

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 3rd November, 2014

6.00 - 8.25 pm

Attendees	
<b>Councillors:</b>	Tim Harman (Chair), Colin Hay (Vice-Chair), Nigel Britter, Chris Mason, Dan Murch, John Payne, Chris Ryder and Max Wilkinson
<b>Also in attendance:</b>	Councillor Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Councillor Jon Walklett (Cabinet Member Corporate Services), Fiona Warin (Green Space and Allotment Officer), Jeremy Williamson (Cheltenham Development Task Force) and Shirin Wotherspoon (One Legal)

### Minutes

**1. APOLOGIES**

Councillor McCloskey had given her apologies.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

**3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 8 September 2014 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.**

**4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS, CALLS FOR ACTION AND PETIITONS**

None were received.

**5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

No matters had been referred to the committee.

**6. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED**

Councillor McCloskey had been unable to attend the meeting and as such had provided a written update (attached at Appendix 1).

The Chairman updated the committee on the recent meeting of the Gloucestershire County Scrutiny Group. The Chairman had attended this meeting, along with the Democratic Services Manager and all districts were represented except for Stroud, though admittedly they did not have a scrutiny committee. The group received a presentation from the County Council on the badger cull review. The review had focussed on the social and economic impact of the cull and those involved had recently been invited to London to

give a talk on the review to the Secretary of State. What had become apparent from the review of the districts was that each approached scrutiny differently, with Cotswolds having decided to merge Scrutiny and Audit Committee. The question of joint scrutiny by those involved in the 2020 project had been discussed and whilst each district was comfortable that this was being scrutinised locally, there was agreement that there was a need to come together to undertake joint scrutiny effectively.

Councillor Hay hoped that Stroud District Council were being invited to meetings of the group despite having alternative governance arrangements (no scrutiny committee), especially if councils were to undertake more joint working. He confirmed that the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee had held their first meeting and as Chairman of the committee, though Councillor Clucas was the representative for CBC, he felt that the meeting had gone well. Members were keen and the feeling was that they wanted to be a critical friend to the Local Enterprise Partnership. There was a lot of money in the county and members wanted to be assured that this was delivering for business in all areas and as such the committee would be scrutinising the growth deal. In terms of economic development at district level, this remained the responsibility of each district council.

## **7. CABINET BRIEFING**

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services had been asked to attend and provide an update on two items scheduled on the forward plan; Information Security Policy (IPS) and revised Procurement Strategy. He started by explaining that the IPS had been created between this council and the shared service partner, Forest of Dean District Council and covered a multitude of things including; security passes, PSN compliance and the modern.gov app to name a few. This process had taken longer than initially anticipated and as such it was likely that this would be taken to Cabinet in December rather than November. The Procurement Strategy was periodically updated to reflect current regulations and legislation and this too would not be ready for the November Cabinet meeting, but would more likely be taken to the February or March meeting. The business case for GO Shared Services had identified significant savings in relation to banking charges and the Cabinet Member Corporate Services would soon be in a position to report some good news on this matter.

Members raised concerns that in an effort to achieve economies of scale and circumvent the OJEU rules, large scale contracts were being created, for which small local contractors were unable to bid. These members queried whether it was possible to create smaller scale contracts which would allow local contractors to bid for work and whether any research had been undertaken into the cost effectiveness of doing this. The Cabinet Member would raise these queries with the appropriate officer.

The Leader talked through a briefing which had been circulated as a supplement to the agenda and highlighted topics that might be of interest to O&S. He confirmed that the report of the Deprivation scrutiny task group had recently been considered by Cabinet and thanked those members, some of whom had since left the council, for their efforts. Work on the Cheltenham Economic Development Strategy would be undertaken by Athey Consulting and was due for completion by the end of the year, to fit in with the Cheltenham Plan programme which had recently been agreed. The Leader apologised that he

had been unable to attend the last meeting and as such missed the discussion regarding the company articles for Ubico. He confirmed that these had now been agreed to allow for other partner councils to join. With regard to the Member Observer status, it was for this council to decide whether it wanted to continue to have an observer at Board meetings and the suggestion was that this matter could be discussed further by the Leader, Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment and the Chairman of O&S. The Leader queried whether an annual presentation to all members would be acceptable.

Councillor Hay voiced his disappointment at the decision not to appoint a politician as a Board Member. His feeling was that an elected member would be best placed to share public opinion at the Board level. He welcomed the suggestion of a public AGM.

A number of members felt that these discussions had reinforced the need to ensure that all members fully understood the various arrangements that were now in place, where powers lay, etc. It was proposed that a member session should be arranged which mapped out who had powers and where.

## **8. ALLOTMENTS SCRUTINY TASK GROUP**

The Green Space and Allotment Officer had been invited to provide an update to the committee on progress against the recommendations of the scrutiny task group. For the benefit of new members, she explained that in 2011 the council was facing a massive increase to the waiting lists for allotments. The council had drawn up a strategy for the identification of land and following a mapping exercise, a large site at Weavers Field was identified. A number of observations, as to how and when the site was being used, were undertaken and with no more than four people using the site at any one time, it was felt that there was scope for the addition of allotments. This proposition proved very unpopular and gave rise to a number of questions regarding provision. A scrutiny task group was set up to look at a number of issues including, sites, turnover, waiting lists and legal issues. The report was taken to Cabinet in 2012 and an update was provided to O&S earlier this year. She then highlighted some of the progress against the recommendations as set out in the discussion paper.

The Green Space and Allotment Officer provided the following responses to member questions;

- Most allotment sites owned by CBC were statutory sites and as such permission from the Secretary of State would be required before these sites could be used for any other purpose. To her knowledge, no existing allotment sites were under threat.
- She was aware not aware of any enquiries having been made by any of the people that had expressed an interest in the proposed allotments at Priors Farm. She suggested that this was latent demand, had allotments been sited on their doorstep, as none of the 80 had applied for the Midwinter site.
- The infrastructure of all sites was improved in the recent past and as such there weren't many, if any, further improvements that could be made and as such, the decision had been taken to hold on to the £600k from the Midwinter sale, until new sites had been identified.

- Admittedly, sites created by developers were likely to be smaller than those created by the council, given that it was more cost effective for the council to create one larger site, than a number of smaller sites. This was not included in the policy as this was not strictly a preference of the council.
- There were not stand pipes to each plot and the taps were switched off over winter to avoid frozen pipes. Allotment holders were encouraged to collect rain water and funding had been secured to provide 150 water butts and guttering, though many allotment holders had their own arrangements in place.
- The Hayden Road site was the main site used by groups.
- Over the years the average age of allotment holders had reduced, as had the size of plot required by most. The council had adopted a flexible approach with regard to the size of plots being given, reducing plot sizes as required.
- There were currently just under 200 people on the waiting list, with all those in the North of Cheltenham having only applied this year. The issue, as had always been the case, was the South of Cheltenham. Turnover was very low and people tended to hold on for a specific site, with all but 2 people having been on the waiting list since 2009.
- The running cost of allotments was subsidised by council tax payers. Whilst the obligation to provide an allotment to people residing within a parish was with the parish council, the borough council did not refuse applications from people living within a parish. Supply and demand for the whole borough would be addressed in conjunction with the parish councils in the next allotment strategy.

Councillor Hay was aware that some people were under the misconception that unless land had the new protections, they would not be protected by the old. This was incorrect.

The Chairman thanked the Green Space and Allotment Officer for her attendance and the update that she had provided.

## **9. CHELTENHAM SPA RAILWAY STATION**

Jeremy Williamson from the Cheltenham Development Task Force talked through some slides (Appendix 2) which he hoped members would find useful in explaining the current situation with regard to the Cheltenham Spa Railway Station and the vision for the future.

He explained that there had been no major upgrades to the station for some 60 years. The station had a restricted up and down, uni-directional two track layout; one track north, one track south and no way of crossing between. This restrictive layout caused major delays in the event of a train failure and meant that the entire network had to close for 7 minutes to allow terminating services to cross the line. As an indication of scale, there were 94 Cross Country train services daily and in addition to this, terminating services and freight trains and 1,812,624 passenger journeys were recorded in 2011/12.

The LEP Strategic economic Plan notes that there is: - Limited direct train services to London; High car dependence; High levels of commuting within the County. The formation of the Gloucestershire Local Transport Board created an

opportunity for third parties to identify and submit bids towards localised priorities and this resulted in the development of a bid with the following components:- two new platforms that would accommodate the future anticipated passenger growth and critically improve performance by separating terminating from through trains (They would also be designed to cater for the Intercity express trains to be introduced in 2017); a completely new hub layout with a proper bus interchange, cycle facilities and a 2 story car park (to help alleviate parking issues); new passenger facilities within a new concourse. Members were shown a virtual tour of what the changes would achieve, which he felt reflected upgrades which had been undertaken to a number of stations.

An initial bid for £3.3m of the anticipated £20m spend, was secured from the Gloucestershire Local Transport Board. However, Network Rail and First Great Western subsequently felt that the additional bay platforms could not be delivered within control period 5 (a railway operating financial structure) so this element was deleted and a new bid submitted. The revised bid for £1.95m of an estimated £10m spend was submitted and whilst it scored highly, only £1.1m was awarded initially and after further negotiation with GLTB this was raised to c£1.5m. The rail industry has secured funding from Access for All and the National Stations Improvement Programme and whilst it is hoped to be worth £2-3m, these sums had not yet been confirmed. A further bid had been made, with the support of Sustrans from the Department for Transport Cycle-Rail initiative, which would assist delivery of the connection of the Honeybourne Line southwards to Lansdown. This would immediately open up cycle connectivity to the south and an interface with the 10 minute X94 Stagecoach service. This would also align with another ambition/bidding process to create a 4 mile Cheltenham-Bishops Cleeve cycle route. The LEP Growth Fund round 2 (or top-up) recently called for projects so a bid was submitted for £10m to fund the bay platforms. This was never expected to be successful as it did not meet the delivery criteria in terms of timescale and it was inevitably unsuccessful, but it was felt important to note future potential, as an important County wide project; Cheltenham is by far the busiest station in the County. First Great Western would be awarded the franchise in the new year and this would hold their position for a further 3.5 years. The LTP3 was out for consultation and it was noted that it mentioned rail in great detail compared to earlier versions. The publication of the Western Route Survey also supported many of the ambitions for Cheltenham and actually acknowledged the capacity issue posed by Cheltenham., .

The proposals fruition would allow for door to door journeys, growth and ultimately, an improved customer experience.

Jeremy Williamson gave the following response to member questions;

- IEP trains formed part of the proposal for the wider Western network. These trains were longer, quieter and the engines were located underneath, which allowed for more passengers.
- The GLTB had devised a complex scoring system and the initial bid had ranked third. The amended bid was resubmitted and this was ranked at fifth. The assumption had been that this would secure the total sum of the bid (£1.95m) however, the GLTB announced that bids ranked at fourth, fifth and sixth would instead be given £1.1m each. After interventions and lobbying the offer was revised to £1.5m.

- The GLTB members include two County councillors, one LEP and one district council representative. The LEP member had abstained from the vote.
- Consideration was given to the relocation of the station at an early stage and was soon discounted. The land, to the North of Cheltenham, was not owned by Network Rail, had already been earmarked for development and was still outside of the town centre.
- He did not agree that the option being proposed would be more expensive as a result of the cut. By using the existing typography, it would be hidden by the cutting.

Asked if and how a scrutiny task group could support or benefit the process, Jeremy suggested that it could help form the boroughs formal response to the LTP3 and Western Route Study.

The Chairman thanked Jeremy for his attendance.

#### **10. LGA PEER REVIEW**

The Chairman introduced this discussion paper which summarised the feedback which had been received from the peer team (Appendix 3).

The Democracy Officer referred members to the letter from the LGA Peer Team which had been circulated as a supplement to the agenda and the action plan which had been circulated at the start of the meeting.

Action point 3; reflect how to use the considerable talents that members bring. Members of the committee felt that the actions as set out on the plan were appropriate and no further actions were required. They felt that it was sensible to approach members with skills or interests in a particular topic, however, asked that all members continue to be invited to participate in task groups. Members felt that lead members had a role to play in ensuring that all members got involved, rather than a small number being involved time and time again.

Members felt that they needed more time to consider their response to the other action points and would send their comments to the Democracy Officer in due course. This item would be scheduled for further consideration at the next meeting of the committee.

#### **11. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS**

The Democracy Officer provided the following additional information in support of the summary which had been circulated with the agenda.

The Review of Public Art Governance – a workshop for the Public Arts Panel and lead members from the O&S Committee had been arranged for the 12 November.

Cheltenham Spa Railway Station – links to the LTP3 and Western Route Study documents had been sent by email to the members of the task group. An initial meeting would be arranged in due course, though some members had expressed a preference for undertaking the main body of work by email.

Cycling and Walking – the next meeting of the task group was scheduled for the 6 November, however, it was possible that this meeting would need to be cancelled if the co-opted members were no longer able to attend. Officers would contact members of the group ASAP.

Members ICT Policy – it was agreed that a group be established to look at the policy which had been drafted and set out what members could expect in terms of ICT provision and support and in turn, what was expected from members. A small number of members would be invited to participate and it was again suggested that this could be done by email, rather than arranging meetings.

**12. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN**

The committee reviewed the latest version of the work plan, which had been circulated with the agenda.

The work plan would be updated as necessary following this meeting and this would include gateway reviews of ongoing major projects.

Members were reminded that they could access the document via the intranet.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 12 January 2015.

Tim Harman  
**Chairman**