

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th January, 2016
6.00 - 8.05 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Tim Harman (Chair), Colin Hay (Vice-Chair), Nigel Britter, Chris Mason, Helena McCloskey, Dan Murch, John Payne, Chris Ryder, Max Wilkinson and Bernard Fisher
Also in attendance:	Councillor Steve Jordan, Councillor John Rawson and Councillor Flo Clucas, Ken Dale (Business Development Manager), Sarah Didcote (Deputy 151 Officer), Richard Gibson (Strategy and Engagement Manager), Angela Gilbert (GAVCA), David Neudegg (2020 Partnership Managing Director) and Mark Sheldon (Director of Resources)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Holliday had given her apologies. Councillor Fisher attended as her substitute.

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 30 November 2015 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS, CALLS FOR ACTIONS AND PETITIONS

None had been received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters had been referred to the committee.

6. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

Councillor Clucas provided a verbal update on both, the Economic Growth and Health and Care scrutiny committees. She highlighted the difference between the two committees in their ability to hold the relevant parties to account. She appreciated that one (HCSC) was statutory and the other (EGSC) was not, but a consequence of this was that, those in power, did not attend meetings of the EGSC scrutiny committee. The economy was key to devolution and she felt it was important for this committee to be aware of the obstacles such issues

presented and decide what it wanted to have in place for the future. The meeting of the EGSC scheduled for this month had been cancelled.

The HCSC met two weeks ago and had requested a follow-up report on some of the issues that had been discussed in relation to staffing. It was clear the difficulties in recruiting clinicians, not just consultants, was having an impact on services and she felt that there was a national debate to be had about how clinicians were trained in this country. The last meeting had been held at the same time as the strike action and whilst the public had been assured that staff levels would be satisfactory, it was clear that there were issues, not least the confusion that this caused with members of the public, who were unsure about where and when they could access GPs, out of hours services, etc; and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) recognised that this needed to be reviewed. She also reported that a divert had been put in place just after Christmas, meaning that Gloucester was full and patients were diverted to Cheltenham, but there were not sufficient staff levels at Cheltenham at the time that the divert was put in place. Another issue that had been raised was that of the £7.1m surplus at the CCG, which would be given back to the Treasury at the end of this financial year and handed back at the CCG at the start of the next, as it was a running surplus. She hoped that the follow-up reports would include information on all of these issues.

In response to a member question, Councillor Clucas confirmed that there were not enough training places to meet demand and reiterated her concerns that the requirement for nurses and paramedics to obtain university degrees was part of the problem, though this was obviously a national issue.

A member explained that scrutiny committees set up by statute would then be able to get access to the Secretary of State and the suggestion was that the EGSC should be set up in this way under the new Joint Committee to give it more importance. All scrutiny committees had been set up in this way for Joint Committees across Wales.

Members were advised that they were able to access documents for all Gloucestershire County Council committee meetings via the modern.gov app on their iPads.

The Chairman reminded members that the NHS Trust were scheduled to attend the April meeting of this committee and that members, in line with the Witness Charter, should submit questions in advance. A reminder would be sent in due course.

At the last meeting of the committee, Councillor McCloskey reported that interviews would soon be taking place, for the position of Independent Member on the Police and Crime Panel. She was now able to confirm that Adrian Connor, Operational Director of Carillion Plc, but who was nearing retirement, had been appointed. She also confirmed that members of the panel had met with the Commissioner, Martin Surl and his team, to discuss some of the overarching issues which would be the focus of 2016/17. The Commissioner had been pleased with the Police budget settlement, which whilst reduced, was better than expected. He gave assurances that Police numbers would remain at December 2015 levels and staff and fleet costs remained the largest expenses. She was pleased to be able to confirm that funding of projects would

continue into 2017, regardless of the outcome of the elections in May, though this was not to say that a new Commissioner might not reevaluate priorities.

7. CABINET BRIEFING

Members were referred to the briefing which had been published separately to the agenda.

The Leader confirmed that the Cabinet meeting scheduled for the 9 February was likely to start later, so as to avoid a clash with the launch event for the Business Improvement District (BID), and allow Cabinet members to attend. The revised start time would be communicated once it had been confirmed. He reminded members that a BID seminar had been arranged for the 28 January at 6pm and encouraged members to attend.

As mentioned in this briefing, he had been busy in recent weeks, taking a series of decisions in relation to the Airport, following the reconstitution of the company. The Gloucestershire Airport Board had been strengthened by appointing two additional non-Executive Directors, Colin Dennis and Liz Carter, who would take the positions of chair and vice-chair of the board, respectively. Their combined experience and knowledge of the aviation industry would be hugely beneficial to the company and to Cheltenham Borough Council, as shareholders. To allow for their appointment, Councillor Jacky Fletcher had stood down and he took the opportunity to thank Jacky for her years of service as a director.

The Leader confirmed that the recommendations of the Cycling and Walking STG had been broadly supported by Cabinet at their meeting on the 12 January and that those that could be actioned immediately would be, however there were some that had cost and resource implications and these would form part of a delivery plan which would be considered by Cabinet in approximately 6 months.

8. BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/16

The Cabinet Member Finance, who had the Deputy Section 151 Officer on hand to answer any technical questions, reminded members that the draft budget had been agreed by Cabinet on the 15 December. However, on the 17 December the Government's provisional financial settlement for local authorities was announced and the cut was significantly more than anticipated, at £839,000 rather than £331,000. Government's strategy was to phase this funding out over the coming 4 years and instead give local councils a bigger share of business rates, but the cuts being announced equated to a 74% grant reduction and £1.5m over the next two years. The timing of the announcement, just before Christmas, left the council with only 4 weeks to achieve a balanced budget.

In October 2015, Cabinet had agreed a budget strategy which proposed that a budget strategic support reserve be developed to cushion the council against situations such as that which the council now faced. An immediate response to the Government's announcement was that the current year budgets had to be reviewed to identify measures which could generate savings and/or additional income, which could be rolled over into 2016/17. He suggested that in an ideal world the council would be able to identify sustainable savings and income of

£0.5m, without having to make any rash decisions. He was keen that the council did not deplete the £1.599m of general balances which had been declared in the draft budget; as using reserves did not absolve the council from having to find sustainable savings in years to come. There would undoubtedly be two lean years ahead for the council and they would have to work hard to protect reserves and services, but he felt it was important that it did not lose sight of longer term objectives, such as supporting the BID, as such initiatives would help the local economy to grow, which would ultimately go towards providing a solution.

A budget monitoring report was being prepared to be taken to Cabinet at the same time as the budget in February. He had attended a useful meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group at which members had asked some very useful questions, and officers had circulated detailed responses, which he was happy to share with a wider audience of members. He noted that he had also attended some useful consultative meetings with the public, key stakeholders and parish councils and thanked all of those that took the time to participate, which was very much appreciated.

The following responses were given to member questions;

- Sensible assumptions were being made about a possible council tax base rate rise. The DCLG had given an indication of what the settlement would be, but there was then a change of policy at a late stage.
- As far as he was aware, other councils were planning to raise their council tax by 2%, but he was not able to comment any further than that. He suggested that, in hindsight, had the Council known that the support in revenue fund was going to be phased out so abruptly, it may not have chosen to freeze council tax for the previous 5 years.

One member commented on the Governments change in policy. Whilst he accepted that the reduction in grant would be mitigated by an increase in business rate retention, there would be a two year gap which had left the council in a difficult budget situation.

The Chairman reminded members that they would get an opportunity to discuss the budget, in detail, at the council meeting on the 12 February.

No decision was required.

9. AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS BEING MADE TO SHARE SERVICES AS PART OF THE 2020 PARTNERSHIP

This item was taken before Agenda Item 6 (Feedback from other scrutiny committees) at the agreement of the Chairman.

The Director of Resources had attended in place of the Deputy Chief Executive, along with the 2020 Partnership Managing Director. He reminded members that in October 2015, both Cabinet and Council had agreed the 2020 shared services partnership structure and that any new CBC services to be considered for sharing, would be subject to further business case consideration by Cabinet. Customer and support services, revenues and benefits and property services were identified as the next services for consideration and as agreed, three Cabinet Member working groups were established to aid development of the

business case briefings. Two of the working groups met on three occasions within a very short period of time, as final business cases were scheduled for consideration by Cabinet on the 9 February. The third meeting of the Property Services working group was deferred, as over the Christmas period, additional options for delivery emerged and Cabinets steer was that these options should be explored in more detail, alongside the 2020 option. This was now scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in April. He also noted that work was ongoing across the partnership, to develop a shared Customer Access Strategy and an added benefit of this collaboration was that it allowed access to Government funding, which would help with new technologies, etc.

The 2020 Partnership Managing Director explained that Annual Services Plans would set out key tasks and actions, outcomes, performance measures and service standards for each Council delivered by the Partnership Venture. Quarterly performance reports would be produced, with the first of these being ready for the first quarter. He felt that these reports would form the basis of the future relationship between the partners and each service delivered by the partnership venture.

The following responses were given to member questions;

- The whole philosophy of the partnership was for individual Councils to retain their identity, with a key measure of success being, customers unaware of any difference in the service they receive. Though this was not to say that it should not be viewed as an opportunity to improve the service.
- As clarification, two full-time Officers would divide their time between clienting responsibilities for the range of CBC services shared with the 2020 partnership, alongside their responsibilities including the Cheltenham Trust and Ubico.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their attendance and for the efforts of all Officers involved in the various Cabinet Member Working Groups; which had conducted their work in a very short period of time. Members were also advised that the start time of the Cabinet meeting on the 9 February was likely to be delayed so as to avoid a clash with the launch event for the Business Improvement District.

No decision was required.

10. A REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT GRANT GIVEN TO GLOUCESTERSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ACTION (GAVCA)

The Strategy and Engagement Manager introduced the discussion paper as circulated with the agenda, as well as Angela Gilbert, Support Services Manager at GAVCA. Over the past five years the council had invested £34,000 per annum in GAVCA through a Community Investment Grant, the only one, since the other two, Hester's Way and Oakley Partnership's, were now funded by the Housing Revenue Account, which was administered by Cheltenham Borough Homes. GAVCA delivered quality advice, support, training and networking opportunities for local VCS organisations and the strength and vibrancy that this added to the local VCS sector, ultimately contributed to the council's vision to deliver the best quality of life for the people of Cheltenham.

The council's current funding agreement ran to March 2016 and as part of the review process, the council surveyed local VCS organisations about the value that they placed on the work of GAVCA and what support or challenges they considered to be priority areas for a future agreement. 25 responses were received and these were summarised in section 5 of the paper, but it was important to note that almost 80% of the respondents felt that GAVCA were best placed to deliver support for the future.

The following responses were given to member questions;

- Whilst GAVCA had sent out the invitation to respond to the survey, it was made clear that this was on behalf of the council and that the responses would go direct to them, rather than GAVCA. It was felt that it would have been disingenuous to suggest in the invitation, that future funding depended on positive feedback.
- GAVCA got a similar response (25 of 299) to their annual survey. It was suggested by a member of the committee that VCS organisations had to dedicate their time and effort to applying for funding and that this could explain, what members felt was a disappointingly low response level.
- GAVCA was a countywide organisation and therefore not entirely funded by or focussed on Cheltenham.

At this point, Angela Gilbert was asked to leave.

Councillor McCloskey explained that she had been the council's appointed representative, to the role of Observer, for some 3-4 years. Despite being an Observer, without the right of a vote, she had always been encouraged to share her opinions and had built a good relationship with the Board of Trustees. In October 2015, a new CEO was appointed and subsequently, Councillor McCloskey was advised that she was no longer needed to attend Trustee meetings. Councillor McCloskey met with the CEO, Catherine Kevis, on the 13 January 2016, but no explanation was given as to why she could no longer attend Trustee meetings and she had drawn the conclusion that it might relate to financial issues. Her opinion was that there was little value in appointing a member to the role of Observer if that member would not be welcome to attend meetings.

Members acknowledged the excellent work of GAVCA, commending Angela in particular and would support the continued funding of the service. They did however, ask that clarification be sought, as to why the Observer had been asked to stop attending meetings and that this entitlement should be made a condition of any future grant. Members were of the opinion that the role of Observer was an important one from the council's perspective as it would allow for regular monitoring of performance and for any issues to be quickly identified and reported back. Were the grant to be renewed, the proposal was that the Observer would be asked to make an annual report to the committee.

No decision was required.

11. CHELTENHAM CREMATORIUM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Business Development Manager introduced the programme definition document (PDD) for the Cheltenham Crematorium Development. Scrutiny had

previously asked to see documentation for projects, with a view to deciding how and when it wanted to scrutinise a particular project and the Crematorium Development was clearly a major project for this council. Following a feasibility study into options for the future of the cemetery and crematorium, the recommendation to build a new crematorium and chapel on the land adjacent to the current site, which was overwhelmingly supported in an extensive consultation of the public and professional users, was agreed by Cabinet and Council in September and October 2015, respectively. The PDD set out clearly, the decision making process; how decisions would be made, by whom and outlined the responsibilities of those involved in the project, so that everyone fully understood their roles.

The Programme Board had agreed in principle, to appoint contractors through a highly regarded national procurement framework and a number of surveys were currently being undertaken in support of any planning applications. The Cabinet Member Working Group, to which Councillor Payne had recently been added, continued to support the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, in consideration of the approach. It was now for the committee to decide how and when it wanted to scrutinise the programme.

A number of members from this committee, also formed part of the Cabinet Member Working Group and it was therefore agreed that those members should report any concerns to the committee, in addition to regular updates on the programme from the Business Development Manager.

The Democracy Officer confirmed that the committee had the right to request sight of any documentation that had been presented to the Programme Board, should any concerns be raised.

12. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

Broadband – the second meeting of the task group had been arranged for Monday 15 February. At this meeting, the group hoped to be able to devise some proposed outcomes for the review and these would be tabled with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their February meeting (22) for approval.

Devolution – the Chairman of the task group, Councillor Mason, advised the committee that the task group had recently met and were comfortable that negotiations were moving in a positive direction. A request had been made for any funding to be guaranteed for a period of five years and whilst the Government had initially said it was not willing to do this, some members were aware of other areas where they had and as such, it seemed that there were no strict rules and ultimately the Joint Authority wanted to secure the best arrangements possible. Admittedly the timescales were tight and the Government had since advised that they wanted to make the announcement about any decision, before the councils could discuss any detail. The task group had queried what form the consultation would assume if the decision had already been announced and there was purdah to consider, with local elections scheduled for May 2016. A member from each authority would form part of the Joint Authority and would each have a portfolio, though importantly, that portfolio holder would not have any decision making power. One of the main discussion points for Cheltenham was the commissioning of Highways and whilst the council didn't want to manage the contract, it did want more say in the

prioritisation of work, but this raised the question of how the council would, in turn, consult with Parish Councils. Importantly, negotiations were ongoing, but Simon Harper from GCC reported that there had been a change in legislation that support for devolution in an area, no longer needed to be unanimously supported.

The Leader assured members that it would not be the Joint Committee which was asked to sign-up to the deal, but that it would instead go to Leadership Gloucestershire. Leadership Gloucestershire were scheduled to meet on the 25 February and it was currently assumed that the Government would announce any decisions publically as part of the budget on the 16 March. His personal view was that there would still be a need for two council meetings, one to sign-up in principle to the deal being offered by the Government, subject to consultation, and then a second to consider feedback from the consultation.

13. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The work plan had been circulated with the agenda.

The Democracy Officer confirmed that;

The Car Parking Strategy which had been scheduled for the February meeting; would now be coming to the committee much later in the year.

The consultants on the Tourism Project would be attending the February meeting and giving the committee the opportunity to comment on the final report, before it went to Cabinet.

The NHS Trust would be attending the April meeting and giving a presentation on future plans for Gloucestershire Hospitals. She reminded members that the council had signed up to a Witness Charter which committed members to providing questions in advance of an external organisation attending a meeting and more details would be circulated in due course.

The Cheltenham Trust had accepted an invitation to attend the June meeting of the committee and would discuss successes and lessons learned after 18 months in operation. This would also allow the committee to set the parameters for future scrutiny of the Cheltenham Trust.

The Chairman had attended a presentation about disabled access in Cheltenham and felt that it would be useful for the committee to receive the same presentation, with a view to undertaking more scrutiny if members felt there was a need. It would be possible to arrange a meeting in an alternative venue so as to make it more accessible to the disabled community. The Lead members would consider the scheduling of this item at a future briefing.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for the 22 February 2016.

Tim Harman

Chairman