

Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 7th March, 2011
6.00 - 7.25 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Malcolm Stennett (Chairman), Garth Barnes, Tim Cooper, Paul McLain, Lloyd Surgenor, Pat Thornton, Peter Jeffries and Jon Walklett
Also in attendance:	Councillor Steve Jordan, Councillor Colin Hay and Councillor Nigel Britter
Apologies:	Councillor Andrew Wall

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Massey and Councillor Wall.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 24 January 2011 were approved as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

A question had been received from Mr Ken Pollock addressed to the chair. In the absence of the questioner, the chair read the question out to the committee.

“If **Option 1** is chosen, reducing the space available in Imperial Gardens below that used last year, and well below the space CF have stated they require, Montpellier Gardens will then have to be used intensively year on year by the Festivals, especially for the Literature Festival, thereby eventually resulting in much the same problems of damage to grass and restored paths as can now be seen in Imperial Gardens.

If **Option 2** is chosen, it would appear that significantly large areas of Imperial Gardens (Cheltenham’s key town centre greenspace and flower-garden) will be tarmacadamed (or gravelled) over, and any so called “re-design” of the gardens incorporating these hard-surfaces will simply be reflecting the location requirements of the Festival’s marquees and tents, substantially for sponsors’ displays.

Do you feel that your committee has adequate details of re-landscaping (especially hard surfacing), and of the durations and precise locations of this extra usage, to be able to pick tonight between just two wide-apart Options, whether to harm one park rather than the other, i.e. to sacrifice either Imperial Gardens or Montpellier Gardens to Cheltenham Festivals’ ambition for growth.”

In response the chair indicated that as this committee was not making a decision on this matter they were unable to respond to the question and would suggest to Mr Pollock that he refers his question to Cabinet.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

None.

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

There were no briefings from Cabinet Members as the items they would have raised were covered on the agenda.

7. STRATEGY FOR THE USE OF IMPERIAL AND MONTPELLIER GARDENS

The chair introduced this agenda item by reminding members that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed this report with a focus on the environmental aspects. The focus of this committee should be to look at the economic aspects of the options presented. However he highlighted the lack of financial information contained in the report. For example a figure of £5.2 million was quoted for the economic benefits that the festivals brought to the town but there were no details on how this figure was calculated. The impact on tourism was also a factor but again there were no details in the report. He also highlighted that only two options were given in the report but there should be a third option which was to maintain the status quo. He had circulated a breakdown of the costs for option 2 which had been made available with the Cabinet agenda for 15 March 2011 but there were no comparative figures available for option 1. The report was also light on the views of residents. In view of this it was going to be difficult for this committee to give a considered opinion on the economic aspects.

The Leader apologised on behalf of the Cabinet Member Sustainability who had not been able to attend this meeting. He emphasised that Cabinet had made a commitment to bring back a report on the strategy at the March meeting. In meeting this commitment they acknowledged that full details were not yet available but these would be worked up during the next stage. He stressed that there had been consultation with stakeholders and there would be further consultation during the next stage. Referring to the figures that had been circulated, he stressed that the £140,000 being spent was for a package of improvements which would benefit all users of the gardens. In particular it was hoped that the improvements made would enable Cheltenham Festivals to stay in the town centre.

In the discussion that followed members made the following comments:

- The report contained no feedback from the Chamber of Commerce or the Town Centre Manager.
- Consideration should be given to other options beyond the two described in the report such as using the the racecourse or the Pittville Pump Rooms and Pittville Park
- A detailed assessment should be made regarding the impact on the town centre if the festivals moved to the racecourse. During Race Week, businesses in the town do get a boost from the evening trade even if the retail trade was down during the day.

- The council should be supporting the Festivals and accommodating their needs. There was also an opportunity for the council to open up new income streams on the back of the Festivals.
- The cost of reinstating the gardens after a Festival must be a factor. The damage to Imperial Gardens had not been rectified following the most recent festival and the gardens were still currently in a poor state.

The Chair moved to bring the discussion to a close by summarising the views of the committee. Generally members were supportive of Cheltenham Festivals and were keen to find a way forward which was acceptable to all. The committee considered they had received a lightweight paper for such an important decision and due to the lack of financial information, they were unable to make a formal recommendation to Cabinet.

Resolved that:

- 1. The committee recommend Cabinet receive additional economic and financial information in order for them to be in a position to assess the benefit of implementing changes to the town centre parks in an endeavour to meet the requirements of Cheltenham Festivals. Along with the proposed options consideration should also be given to maintaining the status quo and / or using areas at the racecourse or in Pittville Park.**
- 2. The committee request that they be involved in reviewing the economic aspects during the next stage of the consultation and receive a detailed report on the options with a full financial breakdown when it is available.**

8. Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The policy and performance manager introduced his report which had been circulated with the agenda. The report had come to this committee to enable them to review the corporate performance of the organisation at the end of Quarter 3 – April to December 2010 and to make any comments and observations in order that Cabinet can agree the report at its meeting on 15 March 2011.

Members had requested a shorter document but he also circulated copies of the complete performance report for members to refer to.

The chair acknowledged that some targets in the report may have been affected by the bad weather, for example attendance at leisure@.

Councillor Cooper referred to the number of FTE days absence per employee where a performance below target was indicated in the report and questioned whether the new system announced by the Cabinet Member Corporate Services at a recent Council meeting was having any impact.

In response the Assistant Chief Executive explained that the Senior Leadership Team played an important role in monitoring sickness absence and reporting procedures had been improved. She advised that the system referred to had not been implemented. Managers had been concerned that if their staff spoke to a third party when reporting sickness absence, there would be a lost

opportunity for the manager to discuss any items of work which needed to be picked up in their absence. The management of sickness absence had been tightened up and all staff now received a return to work interview and improvements were being noted.

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services advised that it had been too costly for the council to introduce the system but CBH had implemented it and were beginning to see positive results. The figures for the council were slightly skewed by the sickness absence at the depot due to musculo-skeletal problems. It was thought that the lifting of the green garden waste sacks could be a factor which may be improved with the introduction of the green waste bins. Training for staff was also a key factor in preventing these types of injuries. The Staff and Support Services Committee had been receiving regular reports on sickness monitoring and he suggested that this committee might want to take up that responsibility.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The Q2 performance be noted**
- 2. A sickness absence report be received at the next meeting**

9. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report which had been circulated with the agenda. The council had acknowledged that members need to be aware of the corporate risks which may impact on the council and the decisions it takes.

At their last meeting the committee had requested that the corporate register should in future highlight exceptions and provide more focus on the risks where the mitigating actions are below target. The format of risk register had been amended in line with this request and agreed by Senior Management Team on the 4th January 2011.

The risk register had been updated by the Senior Leadership Team in January and set out progress against mitigating actions. Members were asked to consider the document before it went to Cabinet on 15 March 2011 and identify any additional risks or actions to be brought to Cabinet's attention.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The Corporate Risk Register be noted.**

10. DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY 2011/12

The Policy and Partnerships Manager introduced the report as circulated with the agenda.

The objective and outcomes framework had been retained, though as the council's budget had reduced by nearly £3m from last year, the scale of activity had reduced with 14 less improvement actions.

Members would not be surprised by the improvement actions as 11 had been retained from the previous year. Item 3.1 of the report set out the outcomes that were directly applicable to the work of the committee.

Government had lifted the requirement to report against the national indicator set which had been welcomed as it presented an opportunity to reflect on indicators used to measure corporate performance and choose new indicators which could be more meaningful.

To ensure that the formal views of the members were captured the draft strategy would be considered by all three overview and scrutiny committees before going to Cabinet on the 15 March and then to Council on the 28 March for final approval.

Feedback from the O&S committees would be included in the final report or in a verbal update from the Leader.

The chair noted the improvements in the report but felt the introduction was still too long and there was a repetition of outcomes. The most useful part of the report was contained in the detailed outcome sections and these should be preceded by a much shorter introduction.

In response to a question from a member regarding some actions which appeared to be missing from the outcomes summary, the Leader highlighted that the report set out the actions for 2011/12 where the council was doing something different from the normal day job.

Other suggestions from members were that the strategy should include more innovative ways of income generation. It should also be supportive of other initiatives in the town, for example could the council be doing more to support the new Parabola Arts Centre at the Ladies College which was now putting on public performances.

In response to a question regarding the lack of any financial targets, the Policy and Partnerships Manager advised that earlier drafts of the strategy had included some target figures for income but these had been removed following discussions with the Chief Finance Officer. He had been concerned that the strategy would be over complicated by inclusion of the figures and these were monitored closely as part of the Bridging the Programme.

Resolved that the draft corporate strategy be noted and a shorter introduction be incorporated removing some of the repetition.

11. STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report which had been requested by this committee.

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services hoped all members had taken the opportunity to read his email dated the 22 February 2011, in which he had outlined the current position of the Council in its move to become a strategic commissioning authority.

A members working group had been established some time ago and was originally tasked with assessing the rationale behind the move to strategic commissioning. In December 2010 Council agreed the move to strategic commissioning and associated changes to the Council structures. He acknowledged that even though Council had supported the Chief Executive's

report at Council, some members still had some concerns about how they would influence the process and their role. The working group were now focussing on member roles and he was attending the meeting in this instance to seek the views and comments of the committee on who should be involved, when and how. He had already attended Social and Community O&S and Environment O&S. He was confident that this was an opportunity to enhance the role of all members. Commissioning required knowledge of needs of the community and members had a role in feeding back from their wards, constituents and the town in general. They could act as a critical friend in the analysis and planning stage of any commissioning review.

The relevant Cabinet Member(s) would sit on the Programme Board for each commissioning exercise and maintain a dialogue with all members to ensure that they were all fully engaged. He was also keen to see Cabinet Working Groups established to support these reviews. Whilst Cabinet Members were accountable, Overview & Scrutiny had a role in monitoring services and ensuring the outcomes were being delivered.

Establishing member roles and a way of approaching commissioning exercises with which all members were comfortable was crucial. No decisions had yet been made, it was an evolving process and as such he urged members to respond to his email.

The working group had discussed the current three committee O&S structure and whether this was the right way forward and whether there was an opportunity to change the structure, though it was not for Cabinet to decide how scrutiny was organised. The County had a different model for O&S, elements of which could be used. Working groups were focussed, interesting and could prove more effective, enabling more open dialogue on options. The Budget Working Group could prove a useful example.

Councillor McLain spoke in support of an overarching scrutiny committee supported by task and finish groups. These groups would be able to analyse performance indicators and carry out detailed performance monitoring.

The Chair was keen to see a schedule of commissioning reviews and understand the rationale for setting priorities. He also asked who would be responsible for making sure that the claims in the budget for making savings from the commissioning approach would be realised.

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services replied that it would be for the Cabinet to work with officers to develop a work plan. This would be incorporated within the Corporate Strategy which would be agreed by Council.

Resolved that the report be noted and a Commissioning work plan is brought back to this committee as soon as it is available.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS
23 May 2011

Malcolm Stennett
Chairman