

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 31st January, 2023

6.00 - 7.55 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	John Payne (Chair), Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Tabi Joy, Julian Tooke, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham (Reserve)
Also in attendance:	Claire Morris, Harry Mayo, Darren Knight, Councillor Matt Babbage, Councillor Peter Jeffries, Louis Krog and Andre Klein

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Cllrs. Beale and Fifield sent apologies, while Cllr. Willingham was in attendance as a substitute.

The Chair welcomed back Cllr. Harvey as Vice-Chair after his leave of absence, and thanked Cllr. Tooke for taking on the role during that time.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs. Joy and Payne noted that they both sat on the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, and had taken part of the discussion on the budget proposals under consideration in item 8.

Cllr. Willingham added in relation to item 7 that he was Chair of the Licensing Committee and the council's night-time economy champion.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Prior to the meeting, Cllr. Chelin had highlighted two typos in the previous minutes. With those changes in mind, the minutes of the 28th November 2022 meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

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

There were none.

5. CABINET BRIEFING

The Deputy Leader reported that CBC had been unsuccessful in its Levelling Up bid for funding to contribute to the National Cyber Innovation Centre, which was disappointing but would not prevent progress on the Golden Valley development. He was keen to get feedback from the decision makers on why this project had not been supported, given its potentially transformational impact on communities in Cheltenham and across Gloucestershire. The GV

development had launched its first public consultation events across Cheltenham, including on the High Street and at Gloucestershire College, and the team would be at the High Street Pod on 4th February.

He added that the Leader of the Council had signed up to a shared commitment to decarbonise transport alongside all other councils in Gloucestershire. Transport made up a significant part of the county's carbon emissions, and as a council they were committed to solutions like integrated mass transit and improving the reliability and cost of public transport.

Looking forward, they continued to face a challenging financial situation, with inflationary pressures and energy prices being the two biggest issues to grapple with. He recalled that in December 2021, inflation had reached a 40 year high of 4.2%. This had peaked at 11.1% last year, though it had reduced slightly since. Interest rates had also increased eight times. Over the same period, energy costs had risen from about 15p for a unit of electricity and 3p for a unit of gas to 40p and 10p respectively, even with the government's caps on pricing.

The latest budget monitoring report for 2022/23 reported a £2.39m overspend against what was a reasonable and prudent budget when it was set. The Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement setting out the level of government funding saw a 3% increase in core funding against inflation at the time of 11.1%, and only guaranteed one year of funding. It placed greater reliance on local tax generation and this council's commerciality to enable a balanced budget for 2023/24.

One Member asked when they were likely to hear back from central government about why the Levelling Up bid failed, and suggested that residents deserved to know why they hadn't supported a project with real benefits for deprived parts of the town. The Deputy Leader was not sure of the timescale of this.

One Member praised the work of finance team in challenging times, and wondered whether Cheltenham's reputation as a wealthy town might have contributed to its lack of support from central government, when in reality it contained areas of acute deprivation.

6. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

There were none.

7. RACE WEEK

Louis Krog (Head of Public Protection) (LK) and Andre Klein (Cheltenham Racecourse) (AK) outlined the key points from their briefing note, which outlined the direction of travel ahead of the festival in March.

AK explained that they anticipated more than 250,000 racegoers over the four days of the festival, with the largest day being Gold Cup day on the Friday. The racecourse had made some changes to capacities across all four days, limiting numbers to 68,500 (a reduction of more than 5,000 on Gold Cup day) to alleviate some of the pressures experienced last year and improve the

experience for customers and residents. Gold Cup day was already sold out, and they were looking forward to providing a good experience for racegoers.

He added that he had been leading on the work to make changes in order to mitigate the issues seen last year, in particular minor social misdemeanours like those seen on Richmond Road. Last year's festival had received about 200 complaints in total, though this included things like beer prices and cold chips. They had trialled the Love Our Turf campaign in November, seeking to promote positive behaviour, improve racegoers' journeys and above all reduce negative experiences for residents. They were developing a better rapport between the racecourse and residents, and the campaign sought to demonstrate an enhanced level of care and respect by providing more street cleaning, bins and toilets, and by placing stewards and wayfinders on the street to facilitate safe and orderly travel.

He added that they were keen to ensure this wasn't just a racecourse initiative, and were working closely with CBC officers, the Business Improvement District (BID) and Chamber of Commerce to ensure a joined up approach to the strategy. The November trial had received no negative feedback, and the principal difference now would be the larger footprint of the festival, covering additional areas. A significant marketing and advertising campaign would support its operational delivery.

LK added that the council's focus was primarily on the enforcement side of things, and they were looking to learn lessons from last year. The Police and Crime Commissioner had arranged a debrief with ward councillors after the 2022 festival, while internal debriefs and reflections had taken place too. The presence of envirocrime officers would be upscaled, particularly at key sites and peak times, as well as police officers and PCSOs with additional powers to act as a deterrent. They would focus on active reporting of offences, and would close a key road southbound on all four evenings to get people away from the racecourse more quickly.

He noted that the council's approach was not just aimed at preventing anti-social behaviour (ASB), but also at supporting wider public safety in areas like taxis and sexual entertainment venues (SEVs). In effect, officers would be on duty from 8am on Tuesday until 2am on Saturday. It was an incredibly resource-intensive program, putting a strain on capacity, but they recognised the need to build on the successful approach trialled in November. The 'war on wee' campaign, led by Cllr. Wilkinson, would also form part of this, and was looking into using things like hydrophobic paint to discourage public urination.

The Chair moved into Member questions and debate:

- One Member asked what it was that made the festival uniquely difficult to manage. AK responded that it was sheer numbers more than anything else, in addition to the four day duration. Racegoers often came from a long way away, for example from Ireland, and tended to stay for the full four days. No other event saw quite so many people moving in and out of town at this rate. Putting wayfinders and stewards along Evesham Road would make a real difference for racegoers and local residents.

- One Member asked whether the officers had had a definite commitment about increased policing to match the council's efforts. LK responded that while they had not had a particular number yet, they might have more information to report back at the February meeting, and would take the query to the Chief Inspector in the meantime. He was confident that the police recognised the scale of the event and the need to take a more robust approach to challenging people. The local policing team had already committed to support CBC's envirocrime officers and were supportive of the work they were doing for racegoers and residents. AK agreed that the police were integral to every element of the plan.
- One Member asked how success would be measured, and how this would affect the level of resource allocated next year. LK suggested that complaints were generally a good barometer, as well as where exactly they came from. The November trial had seen a significant reduction, and hopefully this would continue.
- One Member whose ward included the railway station suggested funnelling racegoers down the Honeybourne Line towards the town centre rather than along Gloucester Road. Another Member noted that this backed onto residential properties as well, so it would just move the disturbance to a different neighbourhood.
- One Member was disappointed that the British Transport Place were not implementing dry trains (for example before 10am) like they did for football fans. There was no obvious downside to this, and it would prevent people getting drunk far too early in the day. Another Member added that large numbers of racegoers also arrived on coaches.
- One Member noted the issue of unlicensed taxis, and the work being done by local authorities in London like the 'know what you're getting into' campaign. They hoped that there would be a joined up approach with ongoing work on the night-time economy.
- One Member noted the issues of ticket touts and illegal drugs. Cocaine seemed to be the drug of choice, bringing with it behavioural changes. AK emphasised that they were sending a clear message that lawbreaking and disorder wouldn't be tolerated. They couldn't stop everybody, but could significantly mitigate harm and disturbance.
- One Member highlighted the work of Ubico in keeping the town clean during race week.
- One Member highlighted CCTV and street lighting as key to public safety, and advocated having more safe crossing places on busy highways like Evesham Road. This was a county council issue but one GCC would likely support as it would have an obvious positive impact.
- One Member noted that a lot of the staff working at or around the racecourse would be young people on temporary contracts, and hoped there were strong safeguarding processes in place. LK agreed that a many festival workers, as well as those working in hospitality in the town centre, were reliant on temporary and less experienced staff, and their safety was key. The council was there to support businesses wherever it could, for example through the BID and through doorstep briefings and checks.

The Chair noted that planning for an event as large as the festival was a year round exercise of which they only saw a snapshot, and thanked the officers for their work.

8. BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR COMING YEAR

Cllr. Babbage (Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group) introduced the group's response to the 2023 budget proposals, noting that several BSWG members were in attendance at this meeting as well as the Cabinet Member for finance. As a scrutiny working group, they sought to scrutinise and challenge the budget setting process and highlight issues of particular importance, and had had a wide-ranging discussion about the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget proposals.

One Member asked whether the group had a particular view on how the council could react to significant external challenges like inflation and interest rates. Cllr. Babbage acknowledged that these macroeconomic challenges had a direct impact on CBC's operation, for example in the increased cost of the Ubico contract. The question was how to determine the best approach, and the council had a diverse set of investments that helped to mitigate the impact of economic uncertainty.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets placed on the record his thanks to the BSWG, noting that challenge and oversight were an important part of the budget process. Cllr. Babbage added his thanks to the finance team for their work in putting the proposals together.

9. RESIDENTS' SURVEY

Darren Knight (Executive Director Place and Communities) (DK) introduced the report and gave a presentation on the background, results and implications of the residents' survey. He was broadly pleased with the results, noting that although overall satisfaction was relatively low, the most common reason for this was highways, which were not a CBC responsibility. The survey gave a good overall sense of where things were at, and would tie in with the Corporate Plan going to Council on 20th February.

The Chair moved into Member questions and debate:

- One Member asked whether respondents were able to provide suggestions or just a rating. DK confirmed it was the latter, but they did also ask people what they would change. The next survey would use more open-ended questions.
- One Member asked how residents felt about the town at night, and how this compared to other places across the country. DK responded that there was not yet comprehensive national data on this.
- One Member praised the use of objective, empirical data to take residents' concerns into account, and asked whether the results could be shared with the county council. DK confirmed that they already had been, and officers like the Director of Community & Economic Development were in regular dialogue with GCC about issues like the High Street paving and highway maintenance.

- One Member echoed the need for close county involvement, noting that heavily parked roads limited the effectiveness of cleaning equipment, while temporary parking restrictions would allow proper street and drain cleaning to take place.
- One Member noted the contradiction between residents wanting more services and a below inflation council tax increase at the same time. Expanded services had to be funded somehow, and the government had cut the revenue support grant.
- One Member highlighted the importance of residents feeling safe in the town. DK agreed, and explained that licensing and environmental health officers were working on a review looking closely at how best to deliver this. There were always ways to improve the services the council provided residents.
- One Member noted that throughout the survey, disabled residents generally reported lower satisfaction levels. It was worth looking more closely at this, although there were obviously GDPR concerns. Roughly a quarter of the population had some form of disability, often linked to long-term health conditions, so it was important to consider how to be as inclusive as possible going forward. DK thanked them for raising an important point, and there was clearly more work needed to understand the scale and implications of this. Another Member added that the council did some good work in reaching out to disability groups, for example as part of its consultations on private hire vehicles.
- One Member noted that the Local Government Association (LGA) were doing their own satisfaction survey, and alignment with this could be valuable. DK agreed that the council could collaborate with the LGA in order to compare their own results with the detailed national picture.
- One Member advocated dialogue and cooperation in order to ensure a good working relationship between the county and borough councils.
- One Member highlighted the need to consider the methodology used when sampling residents, in order to ensure robust and reliable data.
- One Member suggested that the survey lacked some granularity, and noted a high number of reporting errors on the online survey, which made it hard to make a real comparison with the telephone survey. DK agreed that the online portal's respondents were self-selecting, but it did give residents who weren't part of the representative sample to contribute.
- One Member highlighted prospects for young people as an essential area in which Cheltenham was currently struggling. Another Member agreed, and suggested that encouraging young people, especially girls, to think about careers in cyber and technology could help to keep them in the town.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director Place and Communities for the detailed survey and presentation.

10. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

Cllr. Bamford's update from the Gloucestershire Health O&S Committee on 6th December 2022 and Cllr. McCloskey's updates from the Gloucestershire Economic Growth O&S Committee meetings on 29th November 2022 and 18th

January 2023 were taken as read. The Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel had not met since the last O&S meeting.

One Member highlighted the discussion of NHS dentistry in the Health O&S Committee update, especially the third paragraph on the lack of school dental services. There was a clear gap in provision for pupils whose parents couldn't afford to go private, with 1 in 5 children suffering from serious tooth decay. This was an appalling failure to look after the most vulnerable in society, and it was a travesty that it had been allowed to get to this state. Intervention was needed and as a first step they hoped to see the restoration of school dental services. The Chair agreed that it was scandalous to see this happening in Cheltenham, and noted that tooth decay often led to serious health conditions. Another Member noted that dentistry could not be disconnected from overall health, considering the consequences of a lack of dental maintenance. They hoped this would be communicated to the responsible parties, and taken forward to advocate for those who weren't receiving the right level of care.

11. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

The update from the Scrutiny Task Group was taken as read.

The Democracy Officer added that the group's final scheduled meeting had since taken place on 26th January, where members discussed how best to classify and refine the large number of recommendations produced throughout the process. They sought to draw out the key issues to highlight in the final report, and were keen to focus on areas directly within the council's gift or overseen by closely related partners like Cheltenham Borough Homes, to maximise the positive impact.

Cllr. Willingham added as the Chair of the task group that there was a tight deadline for producing the report in time for the next O&S meeting on 27th February, and it might have to be deferred to the April meeting as a result in order to ensure a high quality report with deliverable recommendations. It would be better to take a little longer and deliver a better report, given that they were looking at issues that were decades in the making.

12. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The workplan was taken as read. The Chair added that Members had suggested several topics for scrutiny, which they would review at the next Chair's briefing.

One Member asked whether the wheelchair access item under 'items for future meetings' would cover a wide range of policy areas or one particular aspect. The Chair suggested that a wide-ranging discussion would be most appropriate.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

27th February.

John Payne
Chairman