

Cheltenham Borough Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 3 July 2023

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 8.50 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

John Payne (Chair), Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Tabi Joy, Julian Tooke, Suzanne Williams, Matt Babbage and David Willingham (Reserve)

Officers:

Darren Knight (Executive Director of Place and Communities), Paul Jones (Executive Director of Finance, Assets and Regeneration), Ann Wolstencroft (Head of Performance, Projects & Risk), Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships), Louis Krog (Head of Public Protection and DEPLO), Paul Minnis (Director of Major Development and Regeneration) and Andy Taylor (Principal Commercial Accountant)

Public:

Inspector Mike Yates (Gloucestershire Constabulary), Ali Maule, Andrew Lansley (Culture Board Co-ordinator)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Nelson (Councillor Babbage substituting), Councillor Beale (Councillor Willingham substituting) and Councillor Fifield.

2 Declarations of interest

No interests were declared, although Councillor Harvey subsequently declared a non-prejudicial interest in Item 8 Culture Board, as a trustee of Cheltenham Arts Council.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 05 June were approved as a true record, with the following amendments:

- Councillor Willingham asked that his attendance for Item 7 be noted.

4 Public and Member questions, calls for actions and petitions

There were none.

5 Cabinet Briefing

In the Leader's absence, the Deputy Leader attended the meeting but did not have anything to report. There were no Member questions.

6 Matters referred to committee

There were none.

7 Race Week

The Head of Public Protection (HPP) ran through his briefing note, which set out the additional measures undertaken during Race Week 2023, to reduce the significant anti-social behaviour seen in 2022. These included a reduction in daily capacity at the racecourse, additional marshals, police and PCSOs between the racecourse and town, additional toilets and the 'war on wee'.

He said it was difficult to measure whether or not these measures could be regarded as a success, but there were fewer complaints about ASB, which mostly relating to the town centre, suggesting the 'war on wee' was a success. There was a small spike in the amount of illegal street trading, particularly on Evesham Road, but overall it was felt that this year's event was better managed than last year's.

Regarding lessons learnt, the additional toilets displaced the issue, and some areas of town continued to be badly affected. The hydrophobic paint offer was taken up by some residents and businesses but needs to be rolled out earlier, properly funded and more widely applied for full benefit. Feedback from BID suggested a new location for bus pick-ups in the High Street needed to be found, as the current situation can cause anti-social and aggressive behaviour, caused an obstruction of the High Street and issues with widespread litter - GCC needs to be consulted. Parking and traffic management remain issues to be dealt with by GCC and the racecourse, and the lack of parking enforcement, with cars parked and causing obstruction in taxi ranks, pavements and walkways, also needs to be addressed.

Giving the police perspective on the event, Inspector Mike Yates said that race week is by far the biggest and most complex event his force has to deal with, concerning

public order, safety, traffic management and community impact, around the racecourse and across the whole town. He highlighted the following points:

- the police worked with the racecourse and colleagues from neighbouring teams, bringing in extra resource particularly for the evenings;
- the biggest change was the traffic management plan, involving partial closure of Evesham Road. This worked well on quieter days, but caused some challenges towards the end of the week, with people spilling onto the road beyond the closure, causing congestion and public safety concerns. There is still learning to be had here, with regard to how long the closure remains and the impact it has on residents. Traffic management isn't a police issue, but is still something they have to deal with;
- reducing anti-social behaviour is a big part of the operation, with the objective for police to be very visible and to engage in a positive manner. Some PCSOs faced challenging situations, trying to deal with intoxicated people with little support, and it was vital that police were present to give support;
- positive engagement, messaging in advance of race week, and more toilets appeared to result in fewer issues, but it isn't possible to cater for all circumstances - drunk people often behave badly regardless of any preventative solutions, and police have to think about proportionality in the way they handle them.

Members thanked the HPP and police inspector, agreeing that the event felt better managed overall this year. The following responses were given to Members' questions:

- traffic management was the responsibility of the marshals and the racecourse. The police would have intervened if they witnessed any problems with the way the traffic was being handled, although this has caused further problems in previous years by removing them from their assigned duties.. It wasn't known whether marshals received any specific training in traffic management, but if any accidents had occurred as a result of their actions, they would have been liable;
- the road closure was effective and worth doing, although it did annoy some members of the community. The logistics – timings and area covered – could be looked at, but overall it was better having it than not;
- GCC were not invited to attend the meeting, but could be invited to a future meeting, to discuss traffic management and parking enforcement;
- following an incident where repeated assaults on a vulnerable person at the racecourse were recorded as 'damage to property' - thus giving rise to the question of whether we can believe police statistics in terms of reported crimes – there are many layers of complexity around crime reporting, and work has been undertaken over the last few years to ensure that every crime and victim is recorded correctly. Unfortunately, individual cases, sometimes in operationally challenging situations, may not be reported as they should due to misunderstandings, volume and not following proper procedure. This is not an excuse however;

- the input of the new Chair of the Local Resilience Forum, DCC West, and his implementation of a Strategic Co-ordinating Group for the event, looking at the whole picture – racecourse and town – was valuable; he brought a huge amount of experience of large-scale events and improved cooperation,
- apart from police motorcyclists from neighbouring forces, and British Transport Police at the station, there was no other mutual aid;
- although a £40 fine may not deter some drivers from parking illegally or inconsiderately, the police can only remove a vehicle if it is obstructing the highway;
- British Transport Police already work collaboratively with the police in detecting potential criminal offending in anyone, intoxicated or not, arriving by train, but further liaison could be arranged, to explore the possibility of ‘dry’ trains, to reduce the problem of race-goers don’t arrive at the station in the early morning already drunk;
- Martyn’s Law and the use of New Burdens Funding for this will need to be looked at in the future;
- the racecourse provided approximately 50 marshals and there were 15-20 council officers from Public Protection at different times of day. From a police point of view, it is difficult to give the exact number of additional officers drafted in, as the numbers fluctuated across the days; a lot of officers were deployed at the racecourse, but the impact on the community also had to be policed. The demand on the constabulary is huge, but a ballpark figure of around 25 additional officers at any time would be correct;
- the ‘war on wee’ cost CBC £3k, and received significant national media coverage, raising awareness of the issue. About 30 individuals and businesses took up the offer of hydrophobic paint.

The Chair thanked the HPP and police inspector for all their hard work and for attending the meeting. He looked forward to hearing about plans for 2024.

8 Cheltenham's new Culture Strategy

The Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships said his report sets out the progress undertaken over the last couple of years to develop a culture strategy for Cheltenham, in partnership with the Culture Board. He acknowledged that more work is needed on the action plan, but said that for the first time there was a real sense of direction of travel.

Ali Mawle (Chair of the Culture Board) said this is the first time the town has come together to think about how a wide range of cultural organisations and the wider infrastructure can work together collaboratively on achieving its collective aims for Cheltenham. The growing trust and networking between partners is massive. The Culture Board can act as a first point of call for artists, liaise with developers (including the MX and Golden Valley teams) to ensure opportunities are fairly shared, develop projects together, and improve communication and consultation by working with Marketing Cheltenham, to not only reach visitors but also Cheltenham residents. She said there is still a way to go, and funding is challenging as always,

but with an action plan, together with good will, trust and hope, these are brave steps for the good of the town, and she feels privileged to be part of it.

The following responses were provided to Members' questions:

- whilst it's true that Cheltenham already enjoys a cultural and artistic programme that is the envy of many towns, funding for the arts is low and the strategy aims to increase this, to reach large sections of the town which currently don't engage, and to tap into grass roots talent. It is about pushing beyond for the greater good, increasing participation and bringing more excellence to the town;
- the restrictions placed on live music venues situated in conservation areas, listed buildings, or noise-sensitive premises is an important and challenging question, highlighting the need to balance community, a broad range of music, creative opportunities and the environment. Sharing specialisms is key, as demonstrated by the recent re-opening of The Bottle of Sauce as a music venue, with advice from the Music Venue Trust, a national organisation which understands the challenges in that environment. The Culture Board can bring cohesion to this sort of project. A Member commented that it would be helpful if the Culture Board could speak to Licensing Committee about this at some point;
- without local press or engagement from supermarkets or schools, some areas currently receive very little or no information about events, but the Culture Board is working on communication to ensure events are publicised all over the town;
- the Culture Board is working to ensure that groups representing our ethnically and culturally diverse communities in Cheltenham are represented and engaged in its work;
- engaging with young people is also a high priority, and the Culture Board is waiting for the Cheltenham Trust to establish its young creatives' board to ensure their work can be dovetailed in an effective way. Improving youth engagement across Cheltenham is also being discussed by Cabinet and Council;
- it will be difficult to say when the Culture Board will feel that the strategy is working and its job is done. In one sense, it will never be done until every person in Cheltenham is thriving, but the extraordinary on-going attendance at Culture Board meetings is evidence of the engagement and enthusiasm of all participants. Increased funding will be a real achievement, and KPIs through the action plan will also be a measure of success;
- the remit is broad and unashamedly ambitious, with the three-year strategy set out in bite-size, achievable chunks. Having a huge cultural offer is a blessing and a curse - the economy must have a central voice, but sustainability is also a priority. Resources are limited, but the Culture Board Co-ordinator can bid for Arts Council funding, and potentially increase his hours which could make a real difference. A lot of the input at the moment is based on volunteers and good will, but this forum will bring together large and small organisations.

The Chair summed up, saying that culture is a huge part of Cheltenham's DNA, and the establishment of the Culture Strategy and Culture Board can only enhance its

reputation. He appreciates that it is in a formative state at present, but its scope is ambitious. At a time when it would be easier to cut back than to expand, the Culture Board has made a brave decision to embrace as many aspects as it can. He wished them well, and invited them back to a meeting in one year to report on how they have progressed and what benefits they have brought to Cheltenham.

9 Feedback from other scrutiny meetings attended

No meetings had taken place since June, so there was nothing to report.

10 Updates from scrutiny task groups

There was nothing to update on this occasion.

11 Review of scrutiny workplan

Members were invited to suggest items for future meetings by forwarding them to the sub-committee.

12 Date of next meeting

The next Overview and Scrutiny meeting is scheduled for 04 September 2023.

13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED THAT:

“That in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 3, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3; Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 5; Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

14 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meetings held on 17 April and 5 June were approved and signed as a correct record.

A Member expressed his dissatisfaction in terms of the responses to his questions to Gloucestershire Airport who attended the June meeting.

15 Minster Exchange (MX) update

Members considered the findings of the Internal Audit report on the project and had the opportunity to ask questions.

16 Municipal Offices

Members received a presentation from officers on the redevelopment proposals for the Municipal Offices and were given the opportunity to ask questions.