

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 28 November 2017 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor P W Awford
Councillor R E Allen

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, K J Cromwell, D T Foyle, P A Godwin, R M Hatton, T A Spencer, Mrs P E Stokes, P D Surman, M G Sztymiak, H A E Turbyfield and M J Williams

also present:

Councillors G F Blackwell and R E Garnham

OS.47 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 47.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.
- 47.2 The Chair welcomed Councillor Rob Garnham, the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel, to the meeting and indicated that he would be providing an update at Agenda Item 7. It was noted that Councillor Gill Blackwell, Lead Member for Organisational Development - which included scrutiny - was also present as an observer.

OS.48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 48.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J E Day. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 49.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.
- 49.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.50 MINUTES

- 50.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2017, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 50.2 With regard to Minute No. OS.46.5, the Head of Corporate Services advised that the

resolution to introduce a standard template for action plans arising from Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews had been implemented. The new template had been included in Item 10 – Disabled Facilities Grants Review Monitoring Report and would be used across all actions plan which were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

OS.51 CONSIDERATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

51.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 11-15. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the plan.

51.2 A Member wished to acknowledge the visit to the modular housing factory in Nuneaton which had initially been held for Executive Committee Members and subsequently for Planning Committee Members. He had found it extremely interesting and felt that it had a lot of potential for the future. Another Member expressed a desire to visit the factory and the Head of Development Services indicated that others had also expressed an interest; she was sure that another visit would take place in the future and Members would be informed once any arrangements had been made. A brief discussion ensued around the merits of modular housing and several other Members expressed the view that this was an exciting new concept which should be embraced. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council, and one or two registered social landlords including Severn Vale Housing Society, were all potentially interested; however, it was important to keep in mind that this was not the only product available. The Council was currently in the process of engaging the former Deputy Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency at a strategic level to take forward the work on Junction 9 of the M5 and to gain advice on the range of products and construction methods for modular homes. There would inevitably be more information to come and Members would be kept up to date as and when there was anything further to report.

51.3 A Member noted that a 'Tewkesbury Borough Plan Consultation' report was due to be taken to the Executive Committee meeting on 3 January 2018 and he sought assurance that work had progressed sufficiently to achieve this date. The Head of Development Services advised that a very productive meeting of the Tewkesbury Borough Plan Working Group had taken place earlier that day and, whilst there were a lot of detailed issues to work through, it was still the intention to go out to consultation early in the New Year.

51.4 A Member raised concern that the Spring Gardens/Oldbury Road Regeneration item had been removed from the Agenda for the meeting on 22 November 2017 due to the need for additional resources to be brought in; she questioned what additional resources were required and when they would be introduced. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the level of skill required for the detailed and complex transactions to deliver what the Council wanted for the site were not available within the authority so it would be necessary to bring in those skills. One of the main difficulties this year was that multiple projects were being run across the Council so capacity was limited. Discussions had taken place about the aspirations for the site, and therefore the specification that needed to be put together, and it was hoped to bring in the additional resources for the New Year with a view to moving the project forward in the spring.

51.5 It was

RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.52 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

- 52.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18, circulated at Pages No. 16-20, which Members were asked to consider.
- 52.2 A Member noted that the draft Planning Enforcement Policy was being taken to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 January 2018 and he hoped that it would give Officers some real powers to take action. The Head of Development Services confirmed that the policy intended to make clear the Council's remit and the legislation behind that. A Senior Enforcement Officer had recently been recruited who would bring a range of skills and expertise to help to deliver the policy and, in terms of the Planning Service review, enforcement was a key part of the work plan. The details of the policy could be discussed more fully when it was brought forward to the next meeting. It was noted that the Committee would also be receiving a presentation on the Aston Project at its meeting in January and a Member sought clarification as to what the project was about. The Head of Community Services advised that it was funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and had been set up in 2011 in memory of Cheltenham Neighbourhood Officer PC Lynn Aston. It aimed to work with young people aged 9-17 to address crime and anti-social behaviour. He pointed out that Members would also be receiving an update on its sister project 'Great Expectations' as part of the presentation.
- 52.3 With regard to the Ubico Update, due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 March 2018, a Member sought assurance that the situation had improved. The Head of Community Services confirmed there had been significant progress, particularly in relation to missed bins, although there was still work to do on grounds maintenance which he hoped could be addressed over the winter period. He would be very happy to update Members further in due course.
- 52.4 A Member suggested that an item be included on the Agenda for the February meeting to review the Joint Core Strategy process. In response, the Chief Executive explained that the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy was a Council decision and it could not be called-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Development Services advised that any challenge would be a legal challenge i.e. a judicial review following adoption. The issues in terms of the merits of the strategy had already been dealt with through the examination process and public consultation had been allowed as part of that, as such, a challenge could only be made on a point of law. In response to a query, clarification was provided that, if a challenge was made, it would be a court process.
- 52.5 It was
- RESOLVED** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18 be **NOTED**.

OS.53 GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

- 53.1 Members received an update from Councillor Rob Garnham, the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel, on matters discussed at the last meeting of the Panel held on 8 November 2017.
- 53.2 Councillor Garnham advised that the Chief Executive's report had acknowledged that, whilst crime was rising, Gloucestershire was performing well in comparison with the areas in its "Most Similar Group" of forces – Tewkesbury was fourth out of 15 compared to Cheltenham in tenth position. It was noted that, whilst there was a

lot of fear of crime in the Cotswolds, the crime rate in that area was almost 2.5 times lower than the national average. The Police and Crime Commissioner had provided reassurance that regular “holding to account” meetings were held. The report had also covered the issues surrounding Her Majesty’s Courts in Cheltenham and Gloucester, in particular the poor state of the buildings and the distressing situation whereby victims and those giving evidence had to be in close proximity to alleged offenders. He advised that work was ongoing to see if land at Waterwells would be a suitable site for a single court to serve the county. Concern had been raised about public transport and assurance had been given that this would be investigated. The shortage of Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) was highlighted as a concern, particularly as attendance figures had shown that there were no visits when the Police were most under pressure i.e. on Friday and Saturday nights. Chief Constable recruitment was ongoing and the Police and Crime Panel intended to hold its statutory confirmatory meeting on 18 December.

- 53.3 The Panel had received an update on child protection following Gloucestershire’s poor report from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). ACC Moss had now taken responsibility for child protection and a Public Protection Service Delivery Board had been set-up which included the heads of all departments across the constabulary. HMIC had carried out an effectiveness inspection and the report would be published in February 2018.
- 53.4 Councillor Garnham advised that there had been little comment on the Police and Crime Commissioner’s annual report, which had been deferred from the last meeting, and the Panel had also received the quarterly Police and Crime Panel priorities highlight report. Superintendent Rob Priddy had given an update on the restructuring of the force control room which included new recruitment, changes to shift patterns and triaging of calls. It was noted that just under 7,000 999 calls had been received in August 2017; over 23,000 101 calls - 5% of which were actually Grade 1 incidents (999 calls) - and 4,500 emails were received each month. The same number of staff had been engaged in the control room since 2014 but demand had increased significantly. The Police and Crime Commissioner had updated the Panel on “The Compassionate Approach” which set out his expectations in terms of how the Police and partners dealt with environmental matters and included a “root and branch review of the environmental footprint”. It was noted that there were now seven electric vehicles in the fleet. On the subject of rural crime, the Police and Crime Commissioner had acknowledged that, whilst the amount of rural crime was low, the impact of such crime was high.
- 53.5 Councillor Garnham went on to indicate that he had recently been asked to chair the annual conference of Police and Crime Panels which had been held at Warwick University Business School and was attended by over 130 delegates. One agenda item had covered the formation of a national body for Police and Crime Panels and that was being explored under the remit of the Local Government Association as a special interest group. The idea of Police force mergers was also mentioned with specific reference to the recent proposal of Devon and Cornwall merging with Dorset. Councillor Garnham also mentioned the fact that, in some forces, a Superintendent could be in charge of over 700 officers, whilst in Gloucestershire there was a Chief Constable, a Deputy Chief Constable and two Assistant Chief Constables in charge of 1,065 officers.
- 53.6 A Member raised the issue of mounted Police in Gloucestershire and Councillor Garnham confirmed this had been discussed at several Police and Crime Panel meetings where the Police and Crime Commissioner had highlighted the benefits of having a mounted capability in the constabulary. At a recent meeting, the

Commissioner had been questioned as to why he had paid £60,000 for a second-hand horsebox from Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Another Member queried whether Independent Custody Visitors were able to claim travel expenses to Waterwells and Councillor Garnham indicated that he thought that would be the case but undertook to confirm this following the meeting.

- 53.7 The Chair thanked the Council's representative for his presentation and indicated that the update would be circulated to Members via email following the meeting. It was

RESOLVED That the feedback from the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel be **NOTED**.

OS.54 GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 54.1 The Chair indicated that, Councillor Janet Day, the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee had given her apologies for the current meeting and therefore was unable to give her update in person. She had instead prepared a written update on matters discussed at the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 November 2017 which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Members were asked to consider the information that had been provided.

- 54.2 It was

RESOLVED That the feedback from the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee be **NOTED**.

OS.55 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2 2017/18

- 55.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 21-64, attached performance management information for quarter 2 of 2017/18. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to review and scrutinise the performance information and, where appropriate, identify any issues to refer to the Executive Committee for clarification or further action to be taken.
- 55.2 Members were advised that this was the second quarterly monitoring report for 2017/18 and progress against delivering the objectives and actions for each of the Council Plan priorities were reported through the Performance Tracker, attached at Appendix 1 to the report. Key actions for the quarter were highlighted at Paragraph 2.3 of the report and included the acquisition of two additional properties; receipt of the final Inspector's report for the Joint Core Strategy; and the new missed bin reporting form "going live". Due to the complex nature of the actions being delivered, it was inevitable that some would not progress as smoothly or quickly as envisaged and details were set out at Paragraph 2.4 of the report. In terms of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Members were informed that the status of each indicator was set out at Paragraph 3.2 of the report. Of the 15 indicators with targets, 13 indicators were on target and one was unlikely to achieve its target [the other action had some issues or delay but there was no significant slippage in the delivery of the action]. Areas of interest included: KPI 14 in relation to the percentage of minor planning applications determined within eight weeks which was significantly below target; KPI 19 which showed a substantial reduction in reported enviro-crimes; KPI 23 relating to the average number of days for the Benefits Team to process a change in circumstances which had dropped to 3.46 days compared to the national average of nine days; KPI 28 where the average number of sick days per full-time equivalent had increased by 96.49% during the first two quarters; KPI 29 in respect of percentage of waste recycled or composted which was above the 52% target; and KPI 30 which showed a 100

tonne reduction of waste sent to landfill compared to quarter 1.

- 55.3 During the debate which ensued, the following queries and comments were made in relation to the Performance Tracker:

Priority: Finance and Resources

P32 – Objective 3 – Action a) Deliver the aims and objectives of the commercial property investment strategy – A Member sought clarification as to when the acquisition of the three new commercial properties would be complete.	The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that two of the properties had been acquired and were on the Council's books; the third was currently going through the legal process and it was hoped that outstanding issues would be resolved within the next two or three weeks so that would also be on the books by Christmas.
P32 – Objective 3 – Action b) – Undertake a review of the discretionary trade waste service to ensure that it is operating on a viable commercial level – A Member raised concern that this project had slipped and questioned when it would be properly addressed given that it had potential to generate income for the Council.	The Head of Community Services explained that the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) report commissioned by the Council was expected to have been completed at a much earlier stage; however, Officers had not been happy with the contents and it had now been revised on a number of occasions. It was hoped that the current draft would be the final draft and Officers would then be in a position to look at the recommendations and see if they would work for Tewkesbury Borough Council, and the particular issues within its commercial service. He provided assurance that the final recommendations would be reported to Council by April 2018.

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Finance and Resources

P34 – KPI 2 – Outstanding sundry debt in excess of 12 months old – A Member indicated that Officers had reported that the outstanding debt of £10,973 was close to resolution on a number of occasions and he questioned when this would actually be dealt with.	Members were advised that the debt related to road repair costs and there was a dispute about who owed what; the terms were being agreed with the partners and it was hoped that the issue would be resolved when the report came back to the Committee in quarter 3.
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Priority: Economic Development

P38 – Objective 4 – Action b) Deliver a programme with	The Head of Development Services explained that the Council acted as a
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partners to progress Healings Mill and other key sites to support the regeneration of Tewkesbury – A Member sought clarification as to the Council's role; who the partners were; and what would be achieved by the target date of January 2018.

facilitator. There were a number of different partners involved in the planning process including developers, site owners, agents and statutory bodies such as County Highways. Healings Mill was a historic asset and, whilst the building itself was not listed, it was within a Conservation Area so it was necessary to work with Natural England to find an appropriate solution. By January 2018 it was hoped to have a broad outline and brief for the site which could be used, either with the current developers or others.

The Member questioned why other sites in the area, e.g. Quay Street and Back of Avon, which already had planning permission were not coming forward. In response, the Head of Development Services indicated that, whilst the developers would like to sell it as a package if possible, Healings Mill - and its poor condition - was not helping. Once a plan was in place for Healings Mill other sites should move forward as well.

P38 – Objective 4 – Action c) Explore the potential for the formation of a retail group to support the vitality and regeneration of the town – A Member was pleased to note the formation of a Tewkesbury Town Traders retail group and questioned how it would be reported upon.

The Head of Development Services advised that there was no formal reporting structure; however, the meetings were attended by the Economic Development Officer and she would be able to provide Member Updates when appropriate.

Priority: Housing

P41 – Objective 1 – Action b) Develop the Tewkesbury Borough Plan – A Member raised concern that the target date had been changed to spring/summer 2019 and he sought assurance that it would be delivered within an acceptable timeframe.

The Head of Development Services reiterated that the Tewkesbury Borough Plan Working Group had met earlier that day and both Officers and Members recognised the importance of putting a plan in place in a sound and compliant document. Even if the dates in respect of consultation changed slightly, there was no reason why the target date for the adoption of the plan would not be achieved.

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Housing

P47 – KPI 14 – Percentage of 'minor' applications

The Head of Development Services indicated that it was inevitable that some applications

determined within 8 weeks or alternative period agreed with the applicant – A Member raised concern there had only been a 2% improvement between quarter 1 and quarter 2 - from 66.04% to 68.29% - which was still some way off the 90% target.

took longer to determine than others; however, by the New Year a number of improvement plans would be implemented and she was confident that significant improvement would be made on the figures.

Priority: Customer Focused Services

P49 – Objective 1 – Action a)
Deliver improvements through a review of the Revenues and Benefits service – A Member noted that the Revenues and Benefits team had been reduced by 1.5 full-time equivalents; however, he assumed that workload would increase dramatically once the Joint Core Strategy had been adopted and he questioned whether there were plans to expand the department.

The Chief Executive advised that a lot of the housing benefit work was expected to be lost over the coming months due to the roll-out of Universal Credit. In revenue terms, it would be necessary to collect from the new properties; however, a lot of processes were being automated e.g. online payments. He stressed that the structure was being kept under review going forward. The Lead Member for Organisational Development provided assurance that this was being closely monitored at her monthly portfolio briefings.

P51 – Objective 3 – Action a)
Deliver the Public Services Centre refurbishment project – A Member noted that this project had slipped slightly and he questioned whether this was likely to happen again.

Another Member sought assurance that the pond area at the front of the Council Offices would be tidied up.

The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the March 2018 target date had been optimistic and the new target date of June 2018 was based on a much more pragmatic approach to deliver all elements of the project. The update from the contractors following a market tendering exercise was that the project could be delivered for the money available; as soon as it was brought within budget, a programme of delivery could be agreed and timescales firmed up. The second floor was on target and the first tenant would be moving in mid-December. The other two units would be completed in mid-January. Members had made clear that external areas should be part of the project and he confirmed that the entrance and pond areas were both included.

P52 – Objective 4 – Action a)
Look at collaborative options for the planning and environmental health services – A Member sought further

The Head of Community Services advised that, since he had taken up his role, he had been reviewing all of the services within the department to see how they could be improved. In terms of Environmental Health,

information as to why this had slipped to April 2018.

whilst it may be easier to collaborate with another authority and absorb the service into theirs, he wanted to ensure that Tewkesbury Borough Council had a fit for purpose service so that it would be in a strong position to lead in any future collaboration. The Chief Executive went on to explain that Officers had been looking at potential options for collaboration with Cheltenham Borough Council, particularly in relation to Environmental Health; however, they had now moved away from that and were considering alternatives. It was a similar situation within Development Services where consideration had been given to a joint planning service, although this was not on the table at the moment. Notwithstanding this, there were a number of options available and these were being considered as part of the Planning Services review. Some collaboration had already taken place with Gloucester City Council on the joint advertising of posts and job descriptions allowing Officers to work across borders if there were particular resource issues at either authority. Whilst opportunities for collaboration could come forward at any time, the Chief Executive recognised that the action needed to be reviewed to make it more definitive and ensure that the target date did not continue to be pushed back.

P54 – Objective 5 – Action c)
To improve business continuity, migrate to cloud-based Office 365 – A Member raised concern that this action was marked as complete despite Members continuing to have issues with Office 365 e.g. not being able to connect to the intranet when using apps and having to use 'reply all' for emails.

The Head of Corporate Services advised that phase one of the project was migrating to cloud-based Office 365 and that was complete. He was not aware that Members had been having any issues and he urged them to contact him directly so he could ensure they were resolved. The second phase of the project would include the roll-out of smartphone apps and training would be provided for Members. The Chief Executive pointed out that this specific action related to business continuity, and the Council being able to operate in the event of system failure. A new action would be included to reflect phase two when the Council Plan was refreshed.

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Customer Focused Services

P59 – KPI 28 – Average number of sick days per full-time equivalent – A Member

The Chief Executive explained that this was largely due to an increase in long term sickness; even one or two Officers being

questioned whether there was a particular reason for the increase.

absent due to long term illness could affect the figures quite significantly. In response to Members' concern as to how these absences impacted on other Officers, assurance was provided that the management team did try to backfill and ensure that support was available within the team most directly affected. The Head of Corporate Services indicated that a review of the Absence Management Policy was a pending item in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and he suggested that this could include a workshop to give some information behind the statistics.

P60 – KPI 31 – Food establishment hygiene ratings – A Member queried whether it could be made mandatory for hygiene ratings to be displayed on doors.

The Head of Community Service advised that this was governed by the Food Standards Agency; he would welcome making the display of food hygiene ratings compulsory if and when that came forward.

- 55.4 Turning to the financial information, the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the financial budget summary for quarter 2 showed a £315,331 surplus against the profiled budget; an increase of almost £90,000 compared to quarter 1. A summary of the expenditure position was set out at Paragraph 4.1 of the report. There were two significant overspends: planning income, which had been consistently below target during quarter 2; and garden waste which was below budget as a result of changes to the charging structure whereby customers were making pro-rata payments for the current financial year with a view to moving towards a single renewal date for all customers. Appendix 2 to the report included a summary position for each Head of Service which showed the current variance against their budget and it was noted that this showed an underspend of £115,464 as at the end of September. Particular reference was made to the £88,815 surplus against treasury management activity which was due to access to cheap borrowing rates and the use of more lucrative funds for cash investment, and the income from investment properties following the acquisition of three new commercial properties over recent weeks. Members had been informed of the improved position in retained income from business rates during quarter 1 and this had continued into quarter 2 with a surplus of £187,000 for the first half of the financial year; this was due to increased growth within the borough and fewer successful appeals. Taking into account the positive position on the corporate accounts, the overall position at the end of quarter 2 was a surplus of £315,331. Appendix 3 to the report gave an update on the capital budget which showed an underspend against the profiled budget due to certain projects not starting in the expected timescales, such as the refurbishment of the council offices, and a consistent underspend in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants. Appendix 4 to the report provided a summary of the current usage of available reserves with £308,237 being spent during quarter 2. Whilst there remained a significant balance on the reserves, the expectation was that this would be spent in the future.
- 55.5 In response to a Member query, confirmation was provided that £50,000 had been saved in relation to the housing benefit service. The recovery rate was 99% - there were a number of reasons why the full amount was not received e.g. local authority errors and expenditure for which the Council was not fully reimbursed, such as bed and breakfast accommodation above a certain threshold, but this was likely to total

1% or less which was the reason for the surplus.

55.6 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED That the performance management information for quarter 2 of 2017/18 be **NOTED**.

OS.56 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS REVIEW MONITORING REPORT

56.1 The report of the Head of Community Services, circulated at Pages No. 65-72, provided an update on progress against recommendations arising from the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) Review. Members were asked to consider the report and whether it would be more appropriate to receive updates on an annual, as opposed to six monthly basis, going forward.

56.2 Members were advised that updated progress against the recommendations was set out at Appendix 1 to the report; all outstanding recommendations were intrinsically connected to the funding and delivery of DFGs which was under review by both central government and the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.

56.3 A Member drew attention to Action 1 - those enquiring who may be eligible for DFGs to be supported to see if a possible move to more suitable accommodation would be a better outcome for them, and to provide suitable assistance and support to make this happen, should the person so wish - a Member questioned whether this meant there were people who could have had their properties adapted. In response, the Head of Community Services advised that Officers worked closely with Severn Vale Housing Society and other registered providers to assist people to have adaptations. The Member sought clarification as to how many people had attended the workshop for builders and agents in May 2017 which had been held as part of Action 2 - Look at methods of procuring work, such as (but not limited to) schedules of rates and preferred contractors, as ways that could reduce the time taken for a contractor to be on site, which had been marked as complete - and how many had registered as a result. The Head of Community Services indicated that he did not have the figures for how many had registered but he had attended the workshop and there had been 10-12 local tradesmen present. He had looked at the website earlier that day and there was a fairly good list of tradesman, both locally and within the Gloucestershire area; he undertook to find out the exact figures and advise Members following the meeting. The Member questioned whether DFGs could be promoted in a better way given that the budget was underspent and he was advised that, whilst the Council could advertise the fact that DFGs were available, applicants needed to be assessed by an Occupational Therapist from Gloucestershire County Council who would then make a referral so eligibility and need was not within the remit of the Borough Council. In terms of promotion, DFGs were advertised on the Council website and a new leaflet had recently been produced which he circulated around the table. The report stated that £167,618.61 had been spent on DFGs up to 30 September 2017; however, he had received updated figures that week which showed that this was now £318,000 so there had been an increase. His best guess was that the final spend would be on par with the previous year.

56.4 A Member noted from Paragraph 2.3 of the report that the contract to deliver the Gloucestershire "Safe at Home" Home Improvement Agency service had ceased at the end of July 2017 and he questioned whether this had impacted on DFGs. He knew Gloucestershire County Council had difficulty recruiting Occupational Therapists in the past, and he doubted that the situation had improved in recent years, so he assumed this would also slow down the process. The Head of

Community Services indicated that he was unable to comment on recruitment but, once the referral had been made to the Council, Officers were able to move at pace. The Home Improvement Agency had acted as an agent for those people who wanted to apply for a grant but were unable to do it themselves and Council Officers now provided that level of support. The number of applications made through the Home Improvement Agency had been minimal – less than 20% of total applications – and it was noted that it had also taken a percentage for acting as an agent, effectively reducing the grant. As such, the impact of the cessation of the Safe At Home service had not been significant.

- 56.5 A brief debate ensued as to whether it would be appropriate for the Committee to receive an annual update on progress against the recommendations arising from the DFGs review in future. A Member expressed the view that he would be more comfortable to continue to receive the report on a six monthly basis until the impact of the Universal Credit roll-out had been established. Another Member indicated that he was aware from another meeting that reducing hospital admissions, where alternative care could be provided, was an issue that was currently being considered and any new procedures could have an impact on DFGs. The Chief Executive explained that the amount which the Council received for DFGs was quite high, given the size of the authority and the population of the borough, and this had been questioned. It was quite possible that the situation with hospital discharges and trying to get people back into their own homes as quickly as possible would have an impact on referrals and it would be prudent to continue to monitor the situation on a six monthly basis in accordance with Members' wishes. It was subsequently

RESOLVED

1. That the progress against the recommendations arising from the Disabled Facilities Grants review be **NOTED**.
2. That reports continue to be brought to the Committee on a six monthly basis.

The meeting closed at 6:15 pm