

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held remotely on  
Tuesday, 1 September 2020 commencing at 4:30 pm**

## **Present:**

Chair  
Vice Chair

Councillor K J Cromwell  
Councillor J W Murphy

## **and Councillors:**

G J Bocking, C L J Carter, P A Godwin, H C McLain, P D McLain, J K Smith, R J G Smith,  
P D Surman, S Thomson and M J Williams

## **also present:**

Councillors D W Gray

## **OS.5 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- 5.1 The Chair advised that the meeting was being held under the emergency provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and, specifically, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The meeting was being broadcast live via the internet, it was not being recorded by the Council but, under the usual transparency rules, it may be being recorded by others.

## **OS.6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

- 6.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H S Munro and P N Workman. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

## **OS.7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

## **OS.8 MINUTES**

- 8.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2020, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

**OS.9 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN**

- 9.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 11-19. 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.
- 9.2 The Head of Corporate Services pointed out that, whilst the Executive Committee Forward Plan was not as heavily populated as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, there were differences in the work streams with the Executive's tending to be more fluid and reactive. Undoubtedly more items would come forward as time went on, but he indicated that he would work with Heads of Service to ensure it was as up to date as possible moving forward. The Chair commented that he would not like to see items coming forward at the last minute which then resulted in there being no opportunity for proper scrutiny. Whilst he accepted that the Executive Committee Forward Plan was more fluid the last thing he wished to see were matters appearing on Agenda that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not had the opportunity of scrutinizing, particularly in the current extraordinary circumstances. The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that he would take that message back to Heads of Service.
- 9.3 It was subsequently

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

**OS.10 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

- 10.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2020/21, circulated at Pages No. 20-34, which Members were asked to consider. The Head of Corporate Services reminded the Committee that it normally considered its Work Programme for the forthcoming Committee year in April but obviously, in view of the pandemic, the Committee had not met at that time. Accordingly, it had been necessary to adjust the Work Programme to take account of the impact of the pandemic in terms of response and recovery. Full consultation had been undertaken with the Chair and Vice-Chair in bringing forward this revised programme with the final column providing Members with an audit trail showing the original date when the item was to have been considered. He indicated that the programme would certainly keep Members busy and contained a combination of standing items, such as the quarterly performance tracker which was based around the new Council Plan and the two new priority areas of "Sustainable Environment" and "Garden Towns"; updates on key strategies such as Economic Development and Tourism, Housing and Workforce Development; policy updates such as the new Corporate Enforcement Policy and ad-hoc items requested by the Committee such as the Battlefield Project Plan and the wider Independent Tourism Review. The programme also included the recent motion referred by Council on whether to support the signing of the Tech Talent Charter which would need to be reported back to Council. Two new areas for the Committee were the Council's Recovery Plan, which was recently approved at the Executive Committee and would take the form of a recovery tracker document to be presented quarterly alongside the Council Plan tracker, and the Local Government Association's Corporate Challenge Team's Report which had just been finalised and would be presented to Executive Committee and Council along with an action plan that would subsequently be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10.2 In discussing the Work Programme, a Member referred to the pending items on Page No.33 and asked for an update on when the Committee might expect to see the review of the Complaints Policy and the presentation from Severn Trent Water. The Head of Corporate Services indicated that the review of the Complaints Policy fell within his remit and was scheduled in his service plan to take place at the start of the new year. In terms of the presentation from Severn Trent Water, that was within the work stream of the Head of Community Services and the Deputy Chief Executive undertook to come back to Members with an indicative timescale. In thanking the Deputy Chief Executive, the Chair stressed that this was an important matter for the Committee as it had arisen from a scrutiny review and Members were keen to know what actions Severn Trent Water had undertaken since the conclusion of the review.

10.3 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED** That the revised Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2020/21 be **APPROVED**.

## **OS.11 CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU PRESENTATION**

11.1 The Chair welcomed the representative from North and West Gloucestershire Citizens' Advice Bureau to the meeting and asked the Economic and Community Development Manager to briefly introduce the item. The Economic and Community Development Manager reminded the Committee that the Council had a service level agreement with the Citizens' Advice Bureau which had been in place for a number of years and it awarded a grant on an annual basis for the services provided to residents. The Council had a longstanding and good working relationship with the Bureau. The Committee received an annual presentation which provided Members with information about the work of the Bureau but today's presentation would also touch on the impact of the pandemic on its work over the last few months and into the future.

11.2 In commencing his presentation, the key points of which were set out below, the representative reiterated that, as well as covering the normal work of the Bureau, he would give a brief overview of some of the challenges experienced due to the pandemic:

- Aims – To provide the advice people need for the problems they face; to improve policies and practices that affect people's lives.
- Principles – The Citizens' Advice service provided free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It valued diversity, promoted equality and challenged discrimination.
- Locations – Citizens' Advice now operated from 15 locations in the north and west of the County although obviously no face to face appointments were being carried out at the present time at any of the locations: Tewkesbury Public Services Centre; Prior's Park; Bishop's Cleeve; Winchcombe; Brockworth; Northway; Churchdown; Cheltenham (town centre); Up Hatherley; Gloucester (city centre); Cinderford; Coleford; Lydney; Newent; St Briavels. It should be noted that Tewkesbury Borough Council residents could get help and assistance at any of these locations should they be more convenient and accessible due to work or other commitments. This was one of the advantages of previous mergers as it gave the Bureau a greater reach to help those in need of its services.

- How advice is requested – Majority still wanted face to face, approximately 80% of all contact, 10% via phone and the remainder online although this was not so popular. Face to face was a more expensive method of giving advice but was the preferred option for the people using the service. The reliance on face to face had presented a particular challenge in relation to the pandemic which had meant that only email and telephone services were currently available although there was a new channel over Zoom or WhatsApp but the representative was unclear as to what category that fell within.
- Employment Status – Employed – 38.3% (31.6% the previous year); self-employed – 5.9% (4.5% previous year); carers – 6% (7% previous year); retired – 20.8% (20.5% previous year); permanently sick 13.6% (19.9% previous year) and unemployed 15.4% (16.4% previous year). It was notable that the number of employed had risen quite significantly with the number of sick falling - it was unknown as to whether this was due to Universal Credit but it was more pronounced in Tewkesbury Borough than any other area served by the Bureau.
- Disposable Monthly Income – Under £999 – 48.8% (54.1% previous year); £1,000-£1,499 – 27.8% (24.3% previous year); £1,500-£1,999 – 13.5% (10.5% previous year) and over £2,000 – 9.9% (11.1% previous year). The movement from unemployment to employment had had an impact on the disposable income of people seen by the Bureau and there had been a significant reduction in the number of people earning less than £1,000 and a corresponding increase in those earning £1,000 - £1,400.
- Disabilities – Physical disability – 10.1% (10.9% previous year); mental illness – 8.6% (8.3% previous year); long term health issues 22.4% (30.8% previous year) and not disabled – 58.9% (50% previous year). This mirrored the previous slide with the number of permanently sick people reducing and the number of not disabled people increasing. There was a consistent message coming from the statistics in that the Bureau was seeing more people who were employed and less who were permanently sick or disabled. On one hand this was good news as it appeared that more people were in employment, but it was necessary to ensure that disabled people were still getting the right level of support regardless of their employment status.
- Issues dealt with – 3,370 in 2019/20 compared with 3,167 in 2018/19. Welfare benefits – 923 (781 previous year); Universal Credit 384 (147 previous year); debt – 702 (729 previous year); employment – 291 (308 previous year); relationships – 140 (288 previous year) and housing – 105 (246 previous year). The increases in relation to welfare benefits and Universal Credit were quite significant with housing and relationships falling. Whilst the increases could not be directly related to the pandemic, as the period covered ended in March and the pandemic did not impact until the end of this month; there may well have been an element of pre-planning as people could see what was coming in January and February and sought advice on benefits should they lose their jobs etc.
- Significant issues during the year – Tribunal hearings, increasing levels of personal debt, housing – repairs to private lettings and employment practices. Generally, there had been an increase in complex cases. There had been significant delays in Tribunal hearings and the help of local MPs had been sought culminating in an additional judge being allocated to the area which had improved the position significantly. There had been an increase in the level of personal debt that individuals were carrying which was very worrying given the current situation. The number of complex cases (where a person had more than one issue) was increasing year on year. There had been an increase from 2.1

issues per person in 2018/19 compared to 2.34 in 2019/20.

- Case Study A – Single mother with an arthritic hip, depression and anxiety and acts as Carer for her adult son who in turn suffers with chronic anxiety, was referred by her Housing Association for help with debts; receiving Universal Credit (UC), multiple debts including rent arrears, unable to meet basic household expenditure and unable to properly heat her home. Obtained Debt Relief Order writing off debts of £14,995 and saving £95.34 per calendar month Universal Credit deductions; successfully claimed Carers Allowance in respect of her son - £67.25 per week; reduced water rates from £30 per calendar month to £2.90 per calendar month; applied for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) – awaiting outcome. Client's comment: Everything is so much better now, and I can sleep at night. Thank you so much.
- Case Study B – 44 year old widowed home owner suffering with fibromyalgia, emotional personality disorder and depression. The client's daughter lives nearby with maternal grandparents but very limited contact; receiving Universal Credit (UC); increasing bank overdraft currently £3,225; avoiding spending money on food and heating; emotional and anxious that she may lose her home. Suspended deductions from Universal Credit; reduced water rates to £2.94 per calendar month; reduced energy bill by £239.00 by switching supplier; unsuccessful Personal Independence Payment application – on appeal awarded approximately £4,500 back dated payment and £59.70 per week; obtained Limited Capability for work status, increasing Universal Credit by £341.92 per calendar month and removed stress of complying with work related activity requirements; overall increased annual income by £7,446.44 allowing the client to pay her bills as they fell due.
- Achievements 2019/20 – Advice service at Cheltenham Oncology Unit opened (available three mornings a week covering employment rights and benefits for cancer sufferers); established Help to Claim Service (now in year two and found to be very helpful to Department for Work and Pensions) and consolidated the enlarged organisation (Bureau now covering the area of four District Councils).
- Future Plans 2020/21 – Provide services to assist EU Settlement applicants (EU citizens must apply for residence by the end of March); establish outreaches specifically for Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities (establishing discussions with the Friendship Café in Gloucester to assess requirements) and increase specialists to meet inevitable increase in demand (recently taken on two trainee debt advisors to help with post COVID-19 debt).
- Impact of COVID-19 – Revised Operations – Face to face appointments suspended on 25 March 2020; virtual call centre set up and operational on 27 March 2020; Casework service continued remotely – introduced pre-printed pre-paid reply envelopes, supplied caseworkers with mobile phone each for text use and facilitated video interviews by Zoom and WhatsApp. General enquiries dealt with by phone and/or email – clients called back generally within two days and emails generally responded to by next day. Across the Bureau's area, since the start of lockdown, 6,403 calls had been received 3,327 of which had required a call back and 1,028 emails had been responded to. Service had continued unabated despite the challenges of COVID-19.

- Impact of COVID-19 – Activity in the Period 25 March – 25 August – Looking specifically at the Tewkesbury Borough area:

	2019/20	2020/21	COVID Related
Clients	694	667	341
Issues	1,437	1,562	828
Universal Credit	11%	21%	24%
Other Benefits	28%	25%	20%
Debt	20%	14%	6%
Employment	10%	19%	28%
Housing	5%	10%	12%
Other	6%	11%	10%

- Clients with non COVID-19 issues during this period numbered 326 with 734 issues which meant on average 2.25 issues per person which was in excess of 2019/20 at 2.1 issues per person. As expected in terms of matters dealt with, there had been a reduction in debt enquiries because there had been a moratorium on debt collections, a rent holiday and no house repossessions. However, as expected employment issues had been on the rise particularly COVID-19 related with an exceptionally large increase in enquiries. Whilst it was anticipated that the employment enquiries would remain high it was also expected there would be significant increases in debt and housing enquiries as furlough and the housing measures came to an end.
- Impact of COVID-19 – Other Significant Management Issues – Some staff found home working stressful: blanket membership for all Citizens' Advice staff and volunteers in a counselling service – Together All; Homeworking was more productive for some tasks: ensure future flexibility to maximise productivity; some clients needed face to face help for example due to cost, IT literacy and/or language: investigating use of posters and text service to advise how to arrange an appointment when the office was closed and consideration being given to using outreaches for appointments (some venues were able to achieve social distancing).

11.3 Prior to opening up a debate and questions the Chair asked that in future the presentation be provided to Members of the Committee well in advance to allow them to peruse the information beforehand and consider what questions they wished to ask. The presenter indicated that he would ensure that, in future, the presentation was provided at least a week, if not 2 weeks, if possible, before the meeting of the Committee. The Economic and Community Development Manager also undertook to ensure that this happened. A Member queried the outreach service and asked whether it was only specific Parishes, as opposed to all Parishes, within the Borough and, assuming that it was not all Parishes, questioned access for the rural areas in the Borough and what was done to make rural areas aware of the services of the Bureau. The representative explained how the outreach service worked and, in terms of access in rural areas, he indicated that the service had a good website but otherwise relied upon its national branding for people to be aware of what was available which perhaps could be considered a little complacent. He indicated that information was sent to some Parish Councils on an annual basis but maybe this could be done quarterly with reliance on the Councils to disseminate the information to its parishioners. The Member asked that all Parish Councils be contacted either quarterly or bi-annually as there were many elderly residents in the rural Parishes that she represented who did not have access to the internet and

websites and she was sure that the Parish Councils would happily disseminate information to these people if it was provided to them. The representative indicated that he would organise a standard letter to be sent to all Parish Councils in the Borough on a quarterly basis. The Economic and Community Development Manager indicated that his team could also assist by sending out information to the Parishes with links to the website so that they were aware of what services were on offer; it could be raised at the next Parish Seminar, whenever that took place, and an article could also be placed in the next Borough News. He maintained that there were a number of things that could be done with the Bureau in order to spread the word including posters on Parish Noticeboards for those people who did not have internet access. The Head of Corporate Services indicated that the late summer edition of Borough News had just been produced but within the next month work would start on the winter edition and he would get the Communications Team to speak to the representative of the Bureau about an article. In addition, the Communications Team was starting to put together the quarterly E-Newsletter for Parish Councils – Parish Matters - and something could be included on the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the services provided. It was left that the Head of Corporate Services would take the lead with the Communications Team and the Economic and Community Development Services Manager and the Bureau representative would put in place a plan to promote the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau throughout all Parishes in the Borough. The Chair asked that Members of the Committee also be included to receive any information sent out about the Bureau so they were able to answer questions from parishioners should assistance be required from the services that were provided.

11.4 A Member asked how the Bureau was funded and the representative explained that about one third funding came from local authorities, one third came from the national organisation via grants from government departments for specific projects and the final third from applications to organisations to support specific areas of activity. In total the Bureau received an income of £800,000 offset against costs of £780,000. Another Member sought more information on the plan to establish outreaches for the Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities and queried whether these would be exclusively for those communities - he was concerned that this could cause racial tension if a service was only available to one group when venues such as the Friendship Café in Gloucester were available to any section of the community and promoted harmonious relationships. The representative explained in detail the proposals and stressed that it would be a service for all designed to build on the harmony that currently existed. In thanking the Bureau for its sterling work, a Member queried whether access was limited to the area where the Bureau was located and was assured that anyone could access the services from anywhere within the whole area covered.

11.5 The Chair thanked the representative of the North and West Gloucestershire Citizens' Advice Bureau for a very interesting presentation and, accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED** That the Citizens' Advice Bureau presentation be **NOTED**.

## **OS.12 GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE**

12.1 The Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel presented a feedback report, circulated with the Agenda at Pages No. 35–36, on the meeting of the Panel which had taken place on 17 July 2020. Prior to getting into the detail of his report, the Council's representative felt that it would be useful to clarify the purpose of the Panel which was to scrutinise the performance of the Police and Crime Commissioner whose role it was to scrutinise the performance of the Police. In effect the Panel was one step removed from scrutinising the operational activities of the Police, its job was to make sure that the Commissioner was fulfilling his role. This meant the Panel did not get into detail around specific problems or incidents as

these were dealt with outside of the meetings.

- 12.2 Turning to his report, the Council's representative indicated that the meeting had taken place over Zoom and had started by dealing with a number of housekeeping matters such as the election of Chair and Vice-Chair both of whom were re-elected unopposed. The Panel then had a discussion on COVID-19; the lessons learned and the "new normal" coming out of the pandemic. The Commissioner had detailed how he had dealt with the pandemic in terms of his interaction with the Chief Constable and the operation of the Police ensuring they had the "space" needed to get on with day to day policing. The Commissioner had released an additional £1 million of funding from reserves to ensure funding restrictions did not impact on the ability of the Police to respond effectively. In addition, the government had confirmed that the cost of Personal Protective Equipment to the Police would be reimbursed. The overall tone of how the Police in Gloucestershire dealt with the pandemic had been focused on education and engaging with the public, with enforcement as a last resort. This approach had been supported by the Commissioner as it sought to engage with the community and encourage compliance with the social distancing rules etc. rather than taking a heavy-handed approach, with fines being issued as a last resort. At the start of the pandemic, the Police had suffered resourcing problems with a number of Police Officers self-isolating, but this number had reduced over time with Special Constables being used to supplement resources. Whilst not wishing to promote any positives from the virus, the representative indicated that overall crime had reduced during the pandemic with both burglary and shoplifting falling, the latter primarily due to the fact that most retail spaces were closed. The ability to operate county lines crimes was also restricted with the limitations on travel having a positive impact.
- 12.3 The meeting also received a detailed report from the Police Commissioner's Office presented by the Chief Executive of the Office. Whilst not directly within the remit of the Police and Crime Commissioner there was concern about the poor state of the Courts which was a Home Office matter but obviously impacted on the victims of crime, the Police and criminals. The need for new facilities was promoted particularly because of the risk of more and more hearings being held out of the County in places like Cardiff which was especially unsatisfactory for the victims of crime to have to travel long distances to have their cases heard. On this basis the Panel resolved to follow the example of the Commissioner and write to the MPs in the County requesting their support in maintaining a Gloucestershire-based Court system including the refurbishment of the current provision to make it "fit for purpose" as it had suffered from a chronic lack of investment over decades. The Panel also wished to pass on its thanks to the Police for the way they had performed during the pandemic in keeping communities safe. It was also agreed to support the Black Lives Matter Statement agreed by Leadership Gloucestershire.
- 12.4 The Council's representative reminded the Committee that the previous Annual Report of the Commissioner's Office had been somewhat controversial as the Panel had felt it was too wordy and self-promotional of the Commissioner. A draft of the current report showed considerable improvement and had been much better written. In concluding his report, the representative indicated that the next meeting of the Panel would take place on 18 September but, unfortunately, he would be unable to attend so he would seek to arrange for his Deputy to be available.
- 12.5 In thanking the Council's representative for his update, which had been circulated in advance to Members, the Chair invited questions. A Member asked whether the Council's representative could enquire of the Police and Crime Commissioner why he had chosen not to apply for funding from the Safer Streets Fund when virtually every other Police Force in the Country had done so. The fund had been made available by the government to specifically support pockets of deprivation and areas of high crime levels and it seemed strange that Gloucestershire had essentially missed out on this opportunity. The Council's representative indicated that he would

investigate and report back to Members on this matter. At the conclusion of the discussion, and after the Chair had thanked the representative for his report, it was

**RESOLVED** That the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel Update be **NOTED**.

### **OS.13 GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE**

- 13.1 Members received an update from the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) on matters discussed at the meeting on 14 July 2020. She referred Members to the fact that a report had been circulated with the Agenda at Pages No. 37-38 and she would just highlight some of the salient points contained in that report.
- 13.2 The Council's representative stated that at the start of the meeting there had been two public representations; the first one had been about concerns over the 32 deaths in the Alston and St. Marks Medium Super Output Area (MSAO) in Cheltenham, which had been considered to be very high in that area over a short period of time, and the other related to patient safety concerns with temporary service changes at Gloucester Royal Hospital and Cheltenham General Hospital. In respect of the first representation, the HOSC decided to refer the matter to a different Scrutiny Committee, to investigate why this had occurred so that if there was a re-emergence of COVID-19 later in the year they would be better prepared. It was felt that a significant factor could relate to the fact that there were nine elderly persons establishments in this area. In respect of the second representation, a response was provided around the need to revise practices in order to deliver a safe service and the changes had been endorsed by all 13 emergency consultants working in this area.
- 13.3 Discussion took place on the COVID-19 temporary service changes, which initially had involved extensive re-prioritisation with all organisations in the NHS and Social Care working together, and the use of private hospitals. The infection was still with us although the rates had changed but plans were being put in place for the autumn/winter should there be a rise in COVID-19 cases alongside winter flu issues. It was stressed that the changes were temporary and had nothing to do with "Fit for the Future", although some of the changes were mentioned in "Fit for the Future" which it was felt could cause some confusion. However, it had given the opportunity to try out some of the changes in working practices and use of hospitals that were being suggested in "Fit for the Future" and could be used to inform this piece of work. The temporary changes were set to continue for a further three months. In view of the concerns about the re-emergence of COVID-19 alongside the winter flu, the flu injections were being rolled out earlier and to a wider age group.
- 13.4 The meeting then went on to talk about "Fit for the Future" which was progressing slowly due to the pandemic. The report from the Council's representative indicated that it was hoped to launch a public consultation in September-December, including a virtual consultation of the Citizens Jury in November, with a business case in January/February and implementation in March/April but this may slip dependant on whether there was a second peak of COVID-19. There were two further reports considered at the meeting; Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group Performance Report, which did not read well as nearly all activities and performance had been adversely impacted by COVID-19, and the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group – Clinical Chair/Accountability Report which covered three areas; NHS Commissioner update incorporating national consultation, Primary Medical Care update and Trust updates from Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation and Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation. Both reports were fairly lengthy but were available in full on the County Council's website should Members

of the Committee wish to read them.

13.5 A Member asked whether there had been any discussion around the first question from the public in relation to older people, care homes and the level of deaths from COVID-19 and why the Nightingale Hospitals had been mothballed so early and in effect never really used. The Council's representative indicated that the Nightingale Hospitals had not been mentioned and, as far as the area of Cheltenham with the high elderly death rate was concerned, additional finance was made available in the area to provide an increase in professional care for the elderly and avoid unnecessary travel for family members. Additional training was provided as well as increased Personal Protective Equipment provision and instruction on its proper usage. Ultimately, there were more deaths than was the case in other areas which was why a review was to be undertaken to ensure that lessons could be learned.

13.6 The Chair thanked the representative for her report, and it was

**RESOLVED** That the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Update be **NOTED**.

#### **OS.14 GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE**

14.1 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC) presented the report, circulated with the Agenda at Pages No.39-43, which contained a summary of the Committee's last meeting held on 2 July 2020. He indicated that three main areas had been covered at the meeting; update on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) meeting held on 3 June 2020; GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) verbal update and COVID-19 Response – Planning for Gloucestershire's Economic Recovery.

14.2 The verbal update on the GEGJC meeting was given by the Chair of that Committee and Page No. 39 set out the main points, with the key item covered being the COVID-19 response which was currently very fluid with lots of matters happening outside of the County. The Joint Committee would be taking a co-ordinating role in terms of the response to COVID-19 and would be working closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and District and Borough partners; the aim was to have a united approach across the County. The next update was from the Deputy Chief Executive of the GFirst LEP which was in three parts: Growth Deal Projects; the County's Inward Investment Project; and a New Funding Pot from the government. Picking up the main points under the Growth Deal Projects, which included the West Cheltenham Transport Scheme, West Cheltenham Walking and Cycling Schemes, Airport Schemes and the Gloucestershire Railway Station, it was explained that the LEP had been making sure that these projects continued; working on due diligence and getting funding agreements signed off. In terms of the County's Inward Investment Project, which was aimed at attracting foreign owned companies into the County, obviously this had been heavily impacted by COVID-19 with national and international events having been cancelled resulting in the project coming to a halt for the time being. The team responsible for this project had been deployed onto COVID-19 recovery planning. The Council's representative indicated that he had just noticed a typing error in his report in that the heading for part c., on Page No.40, repeated that for part b. and should read "New Funding Pot from Government". Under this heading the Deputy Chief Executive of the LEP had explained that it was always sensible to have a live project pipeline in the event that government provided a new funding source. In this respect, the LEP had been given six days notice by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for available projects that satisfied a strict criteria. The projects had to be shovel ready; able to be completed by December 2021; recovery and job creation theme focused; and have "green credentials". Fifteen projects were submitted from across the County the most important of which that satisfied the criteria were: Kings

Square, Gloucester; Tewkesbury Garden Town, Cheltenham to Gloucester Cycle Highway and Bishop's Cleeve to Cheltenham Cycle Highway. The plan was to have full business cases ready for submission to the government by the end of July. Finally, the third main area covered was an update from the Director of Economy, Community and Infrastructure regarding the response planning for Gloucestershire's economic recovery. He had advised the Scrutiny Committee that research had shown the people who were going to be most affected by COVID-19 were 17-24 year olds without any work experience. Even those with a degree would find it difficult to get work but this would be even worse for those that had not attained that level of qualification. He also spent some time talking about the fact that some companies may have gone out of business in the normal run of things but potentially the government's furlough scheme had delayed that happening so, rather than get into localised business support where supported businesses may fail, it had been decided to take a sector based approach; looking at the weaknesses in the sectors and assessing what could be done to strengthen and support them in the future. Before the meeting ended the Councillor for Strategic Infrastructure had added that, prior to COVID-19, there had been good news from government with the approval of three significant projects; A417 missing link, M5 Junction 10 and M5 Junction 9. Unfortunately, the onset of COVID-19 had had a significant impact on all of the previously mentioned major infrastructure schemes and many others that had not been specified. Nevertheless, the County Council was doing all it could to progress the plans for the schemes.

- 14.3 The Chair sought questions from Members, and it was asked, in respect of the projects listed under "Growth Deals", what was covered under the "Airport Schemes". The Council's representative was unable to give further details and therefore it was agreed that the Chief Executive would circulate the requested information following the meeting. Whilst addressing the Committee, the Chief Executive took the opportunity to make some comments in respect of J9 and J10 of the M5 and particularly the use of the word "approval" on Page No.43. In respect of J10, funding had been allocated but was subject to the signing of a grant agreement between the County Council, as the Highways Authority, and Homes England, so there was still some work to do but hopefully that would be completed by the end of September. As regards J9, the approval obtained currently was not an approval of the scheme but a strategic outline business case for the J9 work which essentially allowed moving on to the next phase in the scheme development; J9 was a long way from getting approval and there was still a lot of work to be done. The Chair asked the Chief Executive to give further information on the A417 which he understood was now subject to challenge. The Chief Executive indicated that he was not aware of those details, but he understood that the scheme was well advanced. He indicated that he would seek an update on this from County Highways and inform the Committee of the situation outside of the meeting. The simple use of the word "approval" did not mean that everything had been sorted it merely indicated that a stage in the process had been approved. He concluded by stating that he would do a note for the Committee on all three of the schemes to ensure Members were fully aware of what stages each of them were at. A Member also asked for information on the Air Balloon in relation to the A417 scheme and whether it was to be demolished. The Chief Executive stated that this related to the detailed scheme for the A417 and he would provide Members with a link to that scheme on the Highways England website within the briefing note. A Member queried the reference to Gloucestershire Railway Station under 2a, on Page No.40 of the report, and asked whether this related to Gloucester Railway Station or Gloucestershire Railway Stations. The Chief Executive indicated that he thought this referred to Gloucester Railway Station and a scheme to improve links to the station and its general appearance. The Chair thanked the Council's representative for his report, and it was

**RESOLVED** That the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee Update be **NOTED**.

## **OS.15 COMPLAINTS REPORT**

- 15.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No.44-57, provided the annual review of complaints received for scrutiny by the Committee in accordance with the complaints framework which was introduced in April 2016.
- 15.2 In presenting the report, the Head of Corporate Services indicated that Members were being asked to consider the annual update to gain assurance that complaints were managed effectively and to identify any further action required. He indicated that the report was very detailed and therefore he would only pick out the key aspects; Paragraph 2.1 on Page No.46 showed that 200 complaints had been received of which 178 related to Council Services; 164 were actual complaints whilst 14 were just simple service requests; of the 164 complaints, 135 had been responded to on time which resulted in an 82% response rate with 27 being answered out of time which was over the 20 working days. Paragraph 2.2 of the report showed that only 15 complaints had been escalated to Stage 2 where the complainant was not happy with the first response which the Head of Corporate Services felt was quite positive. The breakdown of the complaints by service area was shown at Appendix 1, on Page No.52, and it was not really surprising that the higher profile service areas generated most of the complaints which was an inherent risk of their service delivery; for example there were 89 complaints about waste and recycling, 11 about grounds maintenance, revenues and benefits had 22 complaints and planning 23; the figures for 2018/9 were shown in brackets. Paragraph 3.1 detailed the number of complaints reported in previous years so 2019/20 was very much on par with the previous year of 2018/19. Moving onto Paragraph 4.1, complaints were bench marked against other authorities through LG Inform, which consisted of over 50 other authorities and showed that the Council's performance against other authorities, was very strong as highlighted in the chart. Paragraph 5.1 showed compliments that had been received again shown in chart format on Page No. 48; these were spread across service areas although one of the areas had not been properly populated and should be amended to read "Tewkesbury Leisure Centre". In terms of the Ombudsman report, which was on Pages No. 49-50, Paragraph 6.1-2, only 11 complaints had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman which again was very positive. The Head of Corporate Services apologised for the fact that the pie chart shown under Paragraph 6.2 had not reproduced correctly at the printers but it should show the number of complaints in 2016 as 10, 2017/18 as 12, 2018/19 as 6 and 2019/20 as 11. Overall, in comparison to the number of transactions and customer engagements at the Council for example there are over 4 million bin collections, the complaints figures were extremely good.
- 15.3 The Chair thanked the Head of Corporate Services for the report which he felt was good news but suggested that, as had been mentioned at the Chair's briefing, a little less detail would be better going forward. He also referred to the fact that the report mentioned learning from complaints and changing policies or the way that things were done as a result of complaints, and he wondered whether there were any examples of lessons learned. In terms of lessons learned, for Members information, there was a recent audit report on the complaints framework specifically around lessons learnt and this resulted in a recommendation that there should be some independent assurance check to make sure lessons learned were actually applied. Accordingly, he would be getting someone in the Corporate Services team to liaise with services to check that the outcomes which stated what lessons had been learned had actually been applied. He also gave an example of lessons learned in

relation to the waste service and particularly missed bins where, if bins were repeatedly missed, they went on a red list for a period of time that initiated additional checks being undertaken to make sure the bin was being collected. A Member suggested that it might be worth recording concerns as well as complaints - that way the number of complaints may reduce as they could be dealt with when raised as a concern. The Head of Corporate Services indicated that this was not something that had been considered but could be looked at as part of the review of the complaints framework and he asked the Member whether she had any experience of such an arrangement. In response the Member indicated that it was a practice undertaken in the NHS. It was agreed that this was something that could be investigated going forward.

15.4 It was

**RESOLVED** That the annual complaints report for 2019/20 be **NOTED**.

## **OS.16 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

16.1 The Chair referred to the report, circulated at Pages No. 58-60, which had attached to it the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report, at Pages No.61-90, and prior to its presentation he thanked his Vice-Chair and all Committee Members for their support, hard work and diligent scrutiny of all matters that came before them.

16.2 In presenting the Annual Report, the Head of Corporate Services stated that it detailed the activity of the Committee over the course of 2019/20 and demonstrated the breadth of the Committee's work which included progress reports from Officers on key strategies and policies, quarterly performance management reporting, Working Group reviews, presentations from internal and external sources and special meetings to deal with matters such as the climate change motion referred from Council. In the Chair's introduction to the report there was reference to the Local Government Association Peer Challenge which concluded that the Council had a good governance framework and commented positively on the impact and value of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was particularly pleasing as it was a fairly new Committee in terms of membership. Also, in the Chair's introduction there was reference to the pandemic and how this had changed the way the Council operated, particularly in relation to remote working and virtual meetings, which Members and Officers had adapted to very well. The Head of Corporate Services drew particular attention to Page No.75 of the report under the heading "Looking Forward", which referenced the Committee's role in monitoring the Council's COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan, the new Council Plan and also the up and coming Peer Challenge Action Plan. In concluding his presentation, the Head of Corporate Services advised the Committee that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report would be presented by the Chair to the Council at its meeting on 29 September 2020.

16.3 During the discussion which ensued, the Chair indicated that he would like to propose an amendment on Page No.70 of the report in relation to the final paragraph on the section "Notice of Motion Declaring a Climate Change Emergency". He indicated that it was important to show that the Council was already aware of the importance of Climate Change before the Motion had been submitted and was not simply reacting to the Motion but had been actively addressing this matter beforehand, with initiatives such as the car fleet and the solar panels on the roof of the Council Offices, and would continue to do so going forward.

16.4 Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual report be **APPROVED**, subject to the amendment of the last paragraph under the section entitled "Notice of Motion Declaring a Climate Change Emergency" on Page No. 70 to read as follows:

"The new Council Plan 2020-24 identifies "sustainable environment" as one of its six key priorities within the Council Plan. The Council commits to carefully manage its carbon footprint and support the climate change declaration, which will be carefully monitored by this Committee through the performance tracker."; and

Page No.64 under "Formal Work Programme" third bullet point, the word "Scrutiny" to be inserted after the words "Gloucestershire Economic Growth" and before the word "Committee".

**OS.17 SEPARATE BUSINESS**

17.1 The Chair proposed, and it was

**RESOLVED**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**OS.18 TRADE WASTE SERVICES**

*(Exempt – Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))*

18.1 The Committee received a progress report on Commercial Waste Options for the Council and agreed that a project report should be prepared for the next meeting setting a timeline to bring the matter to a conclusion with a recommendation as to the future provision of a Trade Waste Service.

The meeting closed at 7:30 pm