

Council

Meeting date: 15 December 2025

Public Questions

1. Question from Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Cheltenham Borough Council is proposing a consultation on the establishment of a Town Council. Can the Cabinet Member confirm if the Town Council would fund itself by setting an additional precept above and beyond that which Households would pay to a new unitary Council. If so, can the cabinet member give an estimate of likely amount that each household would pay on an annual basis?

Member response

Thank you for the question. The community governance review is not at the point when any decisions could be made about future precepts. Currently, it is premature to predict what the shape of town and parish councils would be in Cheltenham going forward so estimates cannot be provided.

2. Question from Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste and Recycling and Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space, Councillor Paul Baker

Residents and users of Hatherley Park have raised with me concerns about the condition of the lake where the water level seems lower than normal. My understanding is that Friends of Hatherley Park have been involved with a restoration plan but there is no progress at this time. Can the Cabinet Member clarify the situation and assure residents and users that the Council will commit to restoring the lake in this popular and well used Park.

Member response

The water level in the lake dropped very low during what was one of the driest summer and autumns on record exposing large areas of mud and silt which have built up over many years. The lake is not fed from an existing river or brook and is reliant upon surrounding ground water to maintain its level. With the water table so very low it was unable to replenish itself as it would do normally. Hatherley lake is one of three lakes in the area all of which suffered the same effects, a picture which repeated itself nationally as other municipal parks reported similar issues.

When the water level was so very low it was noticeable how much silt was present in the lake, so a decision was made to remove the silt at the earliest opportunity. A planning application has just been made for this to take place, which if successful could see the lake desilted in February 2026. Whilst this will not fix any issues brought about by drought it will create more water capacity in the lake and make it more resilient to dry conditions in the future. When the work is underway, the clay lining and sides of the pond will be checked for leaks.

Further to this I can also report that the underground feeder pipe that channels the adjacent ground drainage water into the lake has been checked and cleared to ensure there are no blockages.

I can also report that throughout the summer, and autumn, the Council's Green Space Team liaised closely with the Friends of Hatherley Park and placed a series of posters up in the park to keep the public informed of the issue. The Friends are kindly donating £5000 of their funds to the desilting project which will see improvements to marginal planting to improve the aquatic habitat and biodiversity of this much valued local amenity. It goes without saying that we are very grateful to the Friends of Hatherley Park for all their hard work and support all year round.

3. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Richard Pineger

A month or two ago now I had a leaflet from the Liberal Democrats through my letter box and on it, it talked about the state of Balancing Pond just outside Coxs meadow. I'm sure the Charlton Park councillors are fully aware of the state the pond is in and has been in for a very long time now. In the leaflet it said: "Paul is pleased to report that there should be some positive news very soon." Could you please inform me of this good news now?

Member response

Thank you, Mr Craddock, for your question, in response to this I have discussed with my colleague Cllr Paul Baker who has been engaging directly with you as part of his case work for the Ward of Charlton Park and to which you have received a detailed response.

The balancing pond you are referring to is managed by the developer Vistry Group and this relates to the development of Charlton Park (King Arthur, King Henry, and King George Close, and King William Drive) which was built circa 1980's. The pond collects surface water runoff from the estate and during heavy rainfall stores and releases surface water at a controlled rate to the Lilley Brook. This is to balance any potential flood impacts downstream of the estate that could arise due to the introduction of the impermeable surfaces (roofs and roads) on what was previously greenspace.

Working with the Charlton Park Residents Association, Cllr Baker has been supporting local residents, this has included:

- Supporting a meeting between Vistry and residents 13th November 2024
- Engagement with Vistry Group, this resulted in the developer carrying out some minor vegetation work to enable remedial works to facilitate pricing of future works, the commissioning of an ecology survey to identify if great crested newts were present – this concluded none were present.
- The latest update received from the Vistry Group was in November advising that the ecology report needs to be reviewed and that due to work commitments this will take place in January following which a site meeting will be rearranged to take the matter forward. Further to the receipt of your question to Council, officers have reached out to the Vistry Group who have confirmed that a meeting with residents will be reviewed in the new year and that they will carry out such works as deemed necessary to maintain the balancing pond's primary function. The details of this work haven't yet been finalised but will be confirmed in the new year.

Cllr Baker is your active point of contact; further communication will be via the ward member route.

4. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Richard Pineger

What are the council's current plans for the building and expansion of energy infrastructure, including renewables, which I know is a policy that the Liberal Democrats take extremely seriously? And how can we ensure these changes are kept when moving to the new local government model?

Member response

Cheltenham Borough Council is pursuing an ambitious programme to decarbonise its energy systems and embed renewable infrastructure into the town's future, in line with our 2030 net-zero commitment. At the heart of this work is a commitment to expand solar generation and low-carbon heating across the council estate and new development.

We have installed photovoltaic (PV) panels on the new MX building and are planning PV arrays on the first two new buildings at Golden Valley. All new homes being procured for CBC include PV systems as standard. Across our housing portfolio, including new-build properties already handed over, we now have approximately 830 PV installations, with some larger systems powering communal areas in blocks.

Alongside solar, we are investing in low-carbon heating. At major sites such as Leisure@ Cheltenham, we secured Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding to develop a heat-pump solution to replace end-of-life gas boilers—cutting emissions and reducing reliance on fossil fuels for the future. We have also installed Low

Carbon Heating (LCH) systems on some of our properties - including a shared loop ground-source heat pump at one of our sheltered blocks.

We are some ways down the road of developing the first heat network in Gloucestershire with the backing of Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and working with national partners. A heat-network focused on the town centre has been selected building on the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's (DESNZ) pilot zoning outputs and successive Heat Network Delivery Unit grants to progress detailed project development.

Transport electrification is another priority. Through our partnership with The EV Network, Cheltenham is rolling out rapid and ultra-rapid (50kW to 300 kW) charging hubs in key car parks, St James Street, Bath Terrace and Church Piece, providing residents and visitors with fast, reliable charging capable of a full charge in ~20-40 minutes. Delivery is already underway, with Bath Terrace now in operation, and further sites planned.

To underpin these practical steps, the council commissioned a Renewable Energy Study (with CSE/LUC) to map local potential for technologies such as solar, wind and storage. Its findings are informing the Cheltenham–Gloucester–Tewkesbury Strategic & Local Plan (SLP) now being engaged on, so that upon adoption, policies can give statutory weight to renewable energy requirements in new development.

Continuity through any transition to a new local government model will depend on embedding these priorities in formal planning policy and delivery agreements. By enshrining renewable energy standards in the SLP, securing long-term contracts for infrastructure projects, and aligning with county-wide governance through the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) led by Climate Leadership Gloucestershire (CLG), Cheltenham can safeguard progress. The LAEP provides a blueprint for integrated energy planning across the county—covering heat zoning, community energy networks and collaboration with distribution network operators - consistent with national guidance on place-based energy planning. These measures create resilience by rooting energy transformation in statutory plans, shared governance and community ownership, ensuring momentum for renewables and low-carbon infrastructure continues regardless of structural change.

5. Question from Gill Hewlett to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

I notice that there are companies that are not UK owned in line to buy the municipal buildings and I want to know whether priority is being given to UK owned companies and, if not, why not? And also, how much due diligence has been done on the prospective buyers and can they be sure that any contenders do not have links to either Russian or Chinese states?

Member response

Thank you for your question, Ms Hewlett. The preferred bidder for the sale of the Municipal Offices is mostly Cheltenham based. Almiranta Capital, a Spanish firm with UK offices, is a specialist part of that bidding team, operating in the hotel investment sector. The sale itself has been carried out by informal tender process which included a full UK and international marketing process. Throughout the sale process, due diligence is thorough and continuous, supported by independent UK-based property advisors Avison Young and solicitors Anthony Collins.

6. Question from Rich Newman to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Regarding planning proposals, under which circumstances are planning proposals called into committee instead of being decided upon by a planning officer?

Member response:

The Planning scheme of delegation, which is part of the council's constitution, and which can be found on our website, details the circumstances in which planning applications are referred to the Planning Committee. It is a lengthy document that cannot be repeated verbatim here, but in summary it states that an application is called to committee when:

1. It is contrary to the provisions of the development plan and is being recommended for approval; or
2. It is a proposal which the officer supports but the parish council objects and does so prior to the end of the statutory consultation period giving public interest and planning reasons for that objection - *unless* the Chair and Vice Chair consider that committee is not warranted; or
3. It is an application which any CBC Member has requested be called to committee provided that they do so within 21-days of publication of the relevant 'weekly list' of newly registered planning applications and provided that public interest and planning reasons for that request are given; or
4. It is an application submitted 'by or on behalf of' CBC or GCC; or
5. It is an application submitted by a member of the council, a director or a member of staff within the communities and economic development division; or
6. It is an application which the Planning Committee has formally resolved should come to committee; or

7. It is an application which the Director or Head of Planning themselves consider should be determined by committee.

7. Question from Rich Newman to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Does CBC have any precedent for overturning a planning proposal decision made by a planning officer? Can this even be done, is it possible?

Member response

It is assumed that this question refers to the revocation of planning decisions after they have been formally issued, as opposed to the planning committee making decisions contrary to the officer's recommendation (which happens often).

Yes, it is possible to revoke a planning permission; Section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives local planning authorities the power to do this. In practice however, this power is very rarely exercised as an authority will often be liable for paying substantial compensation to any party disadvantaged by the revocation i.e. the developer and/or recipient of the permission.

8. Question from Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Major Developments & Housing Delivery, Councillor Alisha Lewis

The Strategic and Local Plan, currently out for consultation, includes reference (p15) that "Cheltenham will become the new cyber capital for the UK". What impact will the winding up of the NCSC for Startups Program (formerly known as the GCHQ Cyber Accelerator Scheme), have on the future of the Cyber Park?

Member response

Thank you for your question, Emma. The NCSC for Startups programme ran from 2017 until it closed in March 2025. Its purpose was to act as an 'accelerator' for cyber start-up firms, enabling them to access technical guidance, expertise and contacts whilst helping to address national cyber security challenges through collaboration with other startups and Government agencies.

Whilst the programme was based in Cheltenham, Startups came from around the country to be involved. Upon concluding their time on the programme, the startups would then return to their hometowns and cities.

Golden Valley's vision is, in part, to replicate the success of this programme but on a larger scale and in a less formalised fashion. The facilities at Golden Valley (particularly at IDEA – the National Cyber Innovation Centre) are being designed and curated to deliver an ecosystem with collaboration and innovation built into its DNA. Industry, government, academia and start-ups will be brought together into the same space, with tailored programmes and events aimed to foster collaborative working and knowledge spillovers.

The role of GCHQ and NCSC in this ecosystem will be critical. However, the specific NCSC for Startups programme has never been a central requirement. Indeed, with the right blend of facilities, people and businesses, Golden Valley will replicate and amplify the benefits seen in accelerator programmes by providing an ongoing accessible ecosystem that attracts and drives growth.

9. Question from Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The Echo recently reported (October 23rd) that CBC had paid a total £782,468 over just three years on 25 Non Disclosure Agreements (NDA's). Whilst I appreciate the need to protect potentially commercially sensitive information around recent disposal of high value assets, why is this figure so large?

Member response

NDAs ensure that organisations can share investment proposals with us in confidence. Working in this way not only enables us to explore opportunities, test proposals and negotiate terms without risking the release of sensitive commercial information, it also ensures that partners have confidence knowing that their intellectual property and business models are safeguarded.

While there are many ways in which NDAs can be used, part of our success story is how we've built confidence with partners by protecting commercially sensitive information.

There are occasions when negotiations break down or contracts are terminated and as a result a financial settlement may be reached. Whilst the figure quote may sound high it must be balanced against potential investment opportunities as well as future potential for growth.

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Meeting date: 15 December 2025

Member Questions

1. Question from Councillor Martin Horwood to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

How many Section 106 agreements have been concluded in the Leckhampton ward since May 2023 and for which developments?

Member response

1. **21/02750/FUL** – Unilateral Undertaking dated 18 August 2023, land adjoining Leckhampton Farm Court (Redrow Homes Ltd - 30 dwellings).
2. **21/02750/FUL** – s106 Agreement dated 05 July 2023, land adjoining Leckhampton Farm Court (Redrow Homes Ltd - 30 dwellings).
3. **22/02205/FUL** – s106 Agreement dated 12 February 2024, land off Kidnappers Lane (Newland Homes – 13 dwellings)
4. **22/02205/FUL** – s106 Agreement (variation to the above) dated 09 May 2025, land off Kidnappers Lane (Newland Homes – 13 dwellings)
5. **23/00813/FUL** – Unilateral Undertaking dated 19 April 2024 at 170-172 Leckhampton Road (Boo Homes – retail unit + 14 dwellings)
6. **23/01856/FUL** – Unilateral Undertaking dated 23 January 2024 at Leckhampton Lodge, 23 Moorend Park Road (single dwelling)

2. Question from Councillor Martin Horwood to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

How many Section 106 agreements are currently being negotiated in the Leckhampton ward and for which developments?

Member response

1. **25/01073/FUL:** Residential development of 21no. zero carbon dwellings with associated access and internal roads, parking, landscaping, and other associated works and infrastructure. Newland Homes Ltd
2. **25/01031/CONDIT:** Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of planning permission 21/02750/FUL to allow for change in house types/design and associated site layout changes. New Dawn Homes Ltd

3. Question from Councillor Martin Horwood to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

How are councillors currently consulted on section 106 agreements as per policy agreed by cabinet on 5 April 2022 and by council on 20 June 2022 (Cabinet & council paper recommendation 6 and para 6.4) which obliged officers to:

- Notify ward members of any application of interest and identify any known demands for local infrastructure
- Notify ward members when an application is likely to result in section 106 negotiation
- Update planning report templates to include details of section 106 agreements agreed
- Provide section 106 training for members

Member response

Ward members are notified of all planning applications within their ward via a weekly email sent to all members on a Friday. The weekly list is subdivided on a ward-by-ward basis, so that ward members can easily refer to their own areas. Paragraph 6.4 of the 2022 Cabinet report sets this out as follows:

1. Following review of the weekly list Ward members to notify the case officer of any application of interest and identify any known demands for infrastructure in the area.
2. Where an application is expected to result in the need for S106 negotiation, the case officer to notify the relevant ward members to enable engagement early in the application process

The onus is on the member to review that list and comment accordingly within the deadline set out in that email. It is open to members to comment on the need or otherwise for a s106 Agreement at this early stage as well as what that agreement ought to include. This will then be taken into account in the case officer's consideration of the scheme.

In addition, the planning case officer emails the relevant ward member(s) when a planning application (which is likely to be recommended for approval) is to be subject to a s106 Agreement; again, the onus is on the member to respond to that notification email as they see fit.

The Planning case officer does not notify the ward member when a s106 Agreement takes the form of a standardised unilateral undertaking (for example to make a financial contribution towards mitigating any impact on the Cotswolds Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation) as these are non-negotiable. Similarly, the Planning case officer does not notify the ward member where a s106 Agreement simply serves an administrative function such as tying a new permission to a previous agreement for example.

All planning reports include a section on the requisite s106 Agreement heads of terms, in as much detail as is possible at that stage. This section was updated post the 2022 Cabinet/Council reports to add the additional clarity and transparency sought by members.

Annual members' training includes training on Planning obligations and the mechanisms for securing them (s106 Agreements for example). The 2026 members training programme will include a bespoke session on s106 Agreements. The Head of Planning works alongside Planning Committee Members and myself to agree the priorities for training. All members, whether a member of Planning Committee, a substitute or otherwise are invited to attend. I attend as many training sessions on planning as possible and actively encourage my member colleagues to do the same. The latest training took place in November on urban design.

4. Question from Councillor Martin Horwood to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Will the cabinet member refer the policy in Q [3] above to the constitution working group to ensure that planning procedure unambiguously mandates this policy in practice?

Member response

I appreciate the commitment made by Cllr Horwood to ongoing service improvement and this is something I too promote across my portfolio. However, I do not consider this is a matter for the constitution working group. The planning team, further to the reports of 2022 responded to the principles as set out in those reports in respect of enhanced transparency and engagement with ward members on S106.

Engagement in planning applications is a two-way engagement. The planning team facilitate notification to ward members as appropriate and should any ward members wish to discuss any matter, including any potential elements that may form a S106 then it is their responsibility to do so by making contact via email, telephone, our Teams environment or organise a face to face meeting. As regularly expressed to members via planning training, this engagement is actively encouraged.

It should be remembered that S106 can only be negotiated where it is:

1. necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
2. directly related to the development; and
3. fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

Building best practice and checking and challenging our processes is a live service improvement piece and our commitment to this was documented in the Planning Advisory Service/Local Government Association Planning Service Peer Challenge that took place between 27th February, and 2nd March 2023.

I meet with the Head of Planning regularly and the Planning and Liaison Member Working Group has a standing agenda item which provides an open platform to discuss opportunities for service improvement, lessons learnt and building on best practice. Cllr Horwood is a member of that group, and I encourage him to engage either with myself or the Head of Planning on future agenda items as appropriate.

5. Question from Councillor David Willingham to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas

Following the recent publication of the English Indices of Deprivation 2025, several areas of Cheltenham are shown as being in the statistically most deprived quintile when assessed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Could the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services please confirm whether the council will be looking in more detail at the underlying data, and advise how the council will invest in those communities identified as statistically deprived to help improve people's well-being?

Member response:

The English Indices of Deprivation 2025 were published on 30 October 2025 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The indices rank 33,755 neighbourhoods (LSOAs) based on seven domains of deprivation. The domains were combined using the following weights to produce the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation:

- Income Deprivation (22.5%)

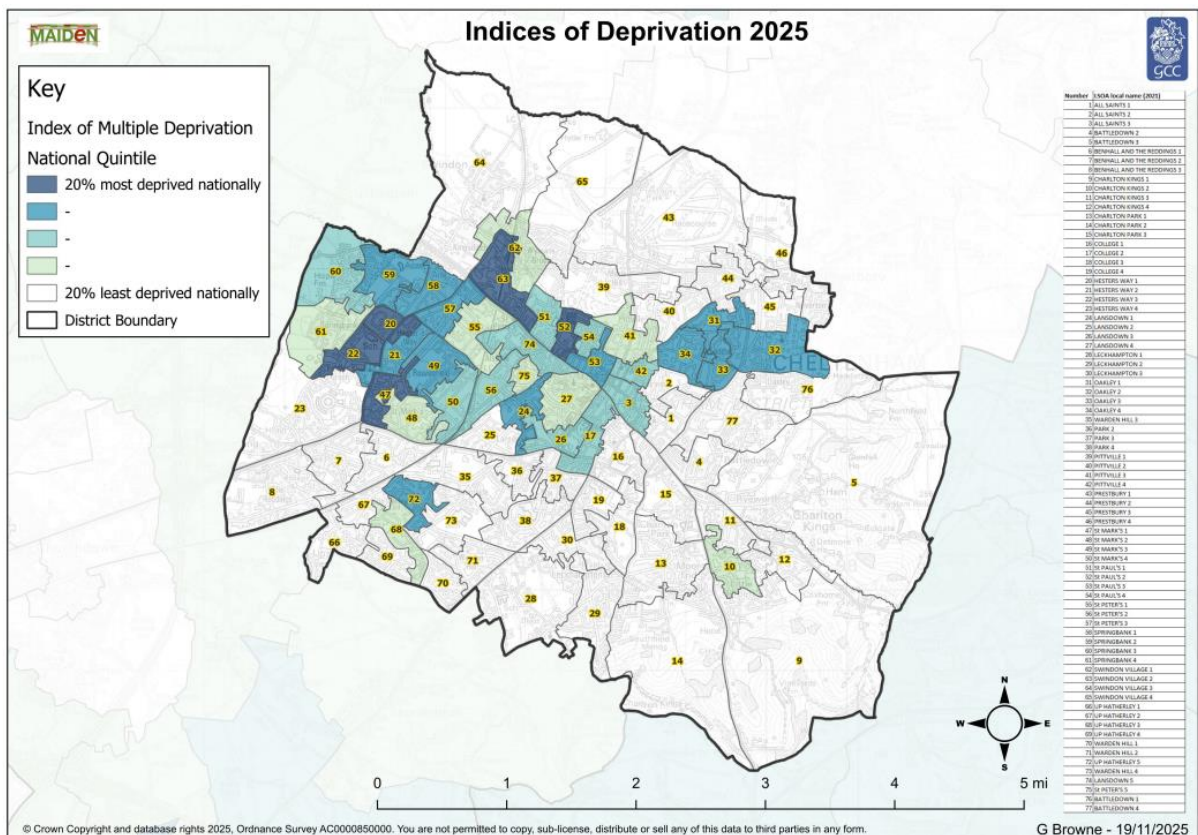
- Employment Deprivation (22.5%)
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation (13.5%)
- Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%)
- Crime (9.3%)
- Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%)
- Living Environment Deprivation (9.3%)

In addition to the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the seven domain indices, there are two supplementary indices: the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index.

The borough contains two Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that fall into the most deprived 10% nationally (parts of Hesters Way and St. Pauls) and three further areas that are in the 20% most deprived nationally.

St MARK'S 1	1,561
St PAUL'S 2	2,298
HESTERS WAY 3	3,715
HESTERS WAY 1	4,983
SWINDON VILLAGE 2	6,141

A map of the Indices of Deprivation is shown below:



In terms of reviewing the underlying data, the County Council has already published more details on the Inform platform:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/inform/deprivation/>

In addition, officers have reviewed the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) which measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families. Cheltenham has 8 areas that are ranked in the most deprived 20% nationally for this indicator. These areas are:

LSOA ref	IDACI national rank
St PAUL'S 2	946
HESTERS WAY 3	1,304
OAKLEY 2	4,334
SWINDON VILLAGE 2	4,628
HESTERS WAY 2	4,755
St MARK'S 1	4,804
HESTERS WAY 1	5,604
OAKLEY 3	6,012

St Paul's 2 is in the top 3% most deprived nationally and second top in the County. This puts this part of Cheltenham in a similar bracket to parts of Blackpool, Sheffield and Birmingham.

The framework for our work on addressing the issues flagged up by the Indices of Deprivation is set out in the Council's corporate plan 2025-2028 which makes a firm commitment to tackling inequalities via Key priority 4 - "Reducing inequalities, supporting better outcomes". Within this priority, there are four aims:

- *Opportunities to be healthy and active should be available to everyone, whether that's through simply spending time in our green spaces or through participation in sport, leisure or culture.*
- *Our leisure and culture assets and services are our key vehicle for providing accessible opportunities for everyone and we need to safeguard these for the future.*
- *To effect meaningful change more broadly on the inequalities agenda, and to ensure we support work on prevention of crime and disorder, we know that we must continue to work with both our public sector partners, and with other organisations through No Child Left Behind.*
- *We also have a role to play in supporting groups and organisations working to make a practical difference within their local communities.*

Within this priority, some of the themes that are currently being delivered on include:

- Healthy and active – the launch of the feel-good pass that enables users of food banks and pantries to access 12 free sessions at Leisure at Cheltenham and three other community activity providers.
- Leisure and Culture assets – undertaking a study of how best to secure the future for Leisure at and the Prince of Wales Stadium
- Working with partners – the Council continues to convene a wide range of groups including the community safety partnership, the facing financial hardship group and No Child Left Behind
- Supporting community organisations – the Council has enabled financial support for community food banks and pantries via the Council's allocation of Household Support Fund, community-based health equity projects via its health and wellbeing grants and has also supported Petersfield Partnership with the Petersfield sports and community hub with works now started on-site.

In terms of housing, CBC housing services teams (Community Investment, Money and benefit Advice, training and employment teams) have a strong track record of working with the St Marks, St Pauls and Hesters Way communities to engage tenants and deliver projects to provide opportunities to increase income, improve life chances and alleviate deprivation.

An example of this was the delivery of a skills hub at Hesters Way resource centre (supported by Councillor Willingham) The teams are currently working on service plans for the coming year which will include projects to further alleviate deprivation. It would be helpful to discuss these plans with Councillor Willingham as they are currently in development.

6. Question from Councillor David Willingham to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

Does the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Realm agree with me that the Lansdown Art Studios (<https://lansdownartstudios.com/>) are an important cultural asset to our town, and could he please reaffirm this council's desire to ensure they able to retain suitable premises in town?

Member response:

Thank you, Cllr Willingham, for highlighting the value of Lansdown Art Studios as part of the wider cultural contribution to Cheltenham and supporting local artists. I visited them myself recently and can see how fantastic they are, particularly in providing a space for growing artists to establish themselves.

The Council has been in active and ongoing engagement with the artist studio related to their current location. The current site occupied by the Art Studios forms

part of a live Section 106 negotiation which is ongoing. I cannot comment on the detail of this due to this being a live negotiation.

The council remains committed to fostering a vibrant cultural sector. We cannot comment on specific premises elsewhere in town, but we share the ambition to see organisations like Lansdown Art Studios thrive and promote creative endeavours through the Visit Cheltenham website.

7. Question from Councillor David Willingham to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Could the cabinet member please confirm this council will pursue full costs recovery against the drivers and insurers of all and any overheight vehicles that collide with and damage overbridges on the Honeybourne Line?

Member response

The council will review each case individually. Following each strike CBC will arrange for our consultant engineers to inspect the bridge and provide advice regarding the damage caused. If any damage is caused and it warrants repair then a claim will be pursued against the third party's insurance policy.

In respect of the recent bridge strike on 4th December our consultant engineers have inspected the bridge and advised that the damage caused was not detrimental to the structural integrity of the bridge with its current use as a footpath and cycleway. We are awaiting their advice whether repairs are required and therefore whether a claim will be made against the third party.