

Council

Monday, 16th October, 2017
2.30 - 7.00 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Klara Sudbury (Chairman), Bernard Fisher (Vice-Chair), Matt Babbage, Paul Baker, Garth Barnes, Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter, Flo Clucas, Chris Coleman, Mike Collins, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Colin Hay, Rowena Hay, Alex Hegenbarth, Karl Hobley, Peter Jeffries, Steve Jordan, Adam Lillywhite, Chris Mason, Helena McCloskey, Paul McCloskey, Andrew McKinlay, Chris Nelson, John Payne, Chris Ryder, Louis Savage, Diggory Seacome, Malcolm Stennett, Pat Thornton, Jon Walklett, Simon Wheeler, Roger Whyborn, Max Wilkinson and Suzanne Williams

Minutes

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Holliday, Parsons and Willingham.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Savage declared an interest in Motion A as a direct employee of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust. He would withdraw from the Chamber for this item.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2017 were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. **COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR**

The Mayor informed Members of her engagements since the last Council meeting in July and highlighted the following :

- All Members had now received a copy of a new map of Cheltenham with details of events, festivals and attractions which had been produced in partnership with CBC, the BID and the racecourse;
- The Battle of Britain service held on 17th September had been poorly attended by Councillors and she requested more Councillors to attend next year. She also asked that prompt replies were given to attendance at civic events.
- The Cheltenham Festival of Cycling and OVO Tour of Britain stage finish on Sept 9th had been an excellent event and she congratulated the team of organisers.

- She thanked Councillor Jon Walklett for organising Mayor Fest at the Frog and Fiddle and thanked Cllrs Babbage and Savage for running the Cheltenham half marathon on behalf of her charities.
- She advised that the Mayor's Christmas Carol Concert would take place this year at Cheltenham College on 9th December

5. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader welcomed the publication of the new map of Cheltenham and informed Members that the Racecourse had distributed approximately 100 000 of these which was a good advertisement for the town.

The Leader informed Members that the publication of the Joint Core Strategy was expected on 1 November and therefore it was likely to be on target for debate and adoption at the Council meeting scheduled for 11 December.

The Leader reported that the new recycling system had been launched that day and he wished to put on record his thanks to those who had been involved in designing it, the crews involved, members of the public and the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment.

6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

There were none.

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Councillor Wilkinson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>A recent survey for 'Guide dogs for the blind' found that 42% of assistance dog owners were refused by a taxi or PHV driver over a one year period, despite this being a criminal offence under the Equality act 2010.</p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member ensure that all taxi and PHV drivers are aware of the law, and can the council look to introduce a provision for all drivers to undertake disability and equality training when obtaining or renewing their licence?</p> <p>Can these measures be taken as feedback in the current taxi licensing consultation?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed "three strikes" policy will introduce additional sanctions for CBC licensed drivers who refuse to carry guide dogs and/or make additional charge for it. • The policy consultation is also proposing the introduction of a driver training procedure that will include, among other things, equality training and a follow up assessment. • The consultation includes proposals to make this training mandatory for all new applicants but also for all current drivers of disabled access licensed vehicles.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The consultation does not however propose the imposition of mandatory disability awareness training all licensed drivers – only those where such training is relevant.</i> • The current mandatory knowledge test that has been taken by all current licensed drivers includes awareness on equality duties relevant to taxi & private hire drivers. • This is supplemented by awareness of equality duties relevant to taxi & private hire drivers through the council’s trade newsletter. • The council is also consulting on making changes to the grandfather rights that may see the implementation of a 100% Equalities Act compliant fleet of public hire vehicles. <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Wilkinson requested that the consultation should seek views on whether there should be mandatory disability awareness training for all licensed drivers.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member agreed that this could be included. He added that it was certainly important that the public had their say and help to bring forward taxi services into the 21st century. He encouraged the public to give their views as part of the consultation which would end on 23 December 2017.</p>
2.	Question from Councillor Wilkinson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>The recent introduction by Gloucestershire County Council of new parking restrictions around Cheltenham Spa station and Lansdown has predictably caused issues with increased commuter parking in nearby areas, including Park ward. Residents report dangerous parking close to corners and on pavements, as well as difficulty finding space for their vehicles and obstructions to buses in an area stretching from Hatherley Court Road to Gratton Road. What representations will this council make to ensure residents in Park ward are consulted by Gloucestershire County Council on future parking arrangements, including the option of a consultation in the affected areas?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The changes to on-street parking restrictions in the vicinity of Cheltenham Spa station and within Lansdown have now been implemented by GCC following public consultation. Clearly, not everyone is happy with the resulting impacts of the scheme, which did not respond fully to the representations submitted by CBC through the Leader.</p> <p>The influence which the Borough Council can bring to bear is limited and whilst I have been lobbying for greater devolvement of powers to CBC in respect of highway maintenance and on-street parking arrangements, these are currently issues for GCC to reconcile and to scrutinise through its own internal processes.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Wilkinson noted that there was a Cabinet Member of GCC who was also a member of this council. He requested that he be asked to relay a message to the county council that they needed to come up with an effective parking strategy to cover the</p>

	<p>whole town which considers the knock-on effects of displacement parking when new schemes are introduced.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member acknowledged that displacement parking was an issue. He considered that the problems referred to in the question relating to this particular scheme were down to insufficient consultation by the county council particularly with local businesses and he hoped that in future the county council would be listening more to the views of the public and businesses.</p>
3.	Question from Councillor John Payne to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>Now that Phase 1 of the Cheltenham Transportation Scheme has bedded in, could the Cabinet Member please update the Council on pollution levels in the area around Imperial Square, given that there are no recording devices in Imperial Square.</p>
Response from Cabinet Member	
	<p>Phase 2 of the Cheltenham Transport Plan was completed in spring 2017, and involved allowing 2 way traffic in Imperial Square, outside the Town Hall. Traffic originating in Montpellier was not able to turn right into Imperial Square until Phase 2 was completed, so there wouldn't have been any impact on Imperial Square at all from the Phase 1 works in Albion Street. This two-way scheme wasn't designed specifically to improve air quality. Any such improvements in air quality are incidental, as I understand the scheme was designed to reduce congestion and make easier access to parking for visitors to the town centre, from the direction of Montpellier, in particular, to allow access to the car parks at Rodney Road and Regent Street.</p> <p>If the Council had decided to monitor air quality in Imperial Square this would not have commenced at the opening up of the two-way scheme, as there is a period of "bedding in" (until such time that regular users of the previous one-way system had time to assess whether the two-way scheme had an effect on their regular journeys or whether alternative routes would have been felt necessary).</p> <p>Traffic flows on this stretch of Imperial Square are also likely to be affected by further changes to traffic management in the area, particularly at the junction of St.George's Road and the Promenade. These works are expected to commence in 2018.</p> <p>Officers have assessed there to be very little relevant exposure in Imperial Square, as most of the properties are commercial buildings, and any residential properties are set well back from the road. The Environmental Protection team discussed the layout changes to this road at the beginning of this year when monitoring points were reviewed, knowing that the two-way scheme might have air quality implications. They propose to install a diffusion tube, or other monitoring device, for a 12 month period commencing January 2018 at a place of relevant exposure in Imperial Square.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question Councillor Payne considered the pollution levels in Prestbury High Street were high due to the increased traffic arising from developments in Winchcombe. He had been advised that the detectors had been removed because the readings were lower than they had been but he was aware that there were 33 areas in Cheltenham with lower readings than Prestbury High Street. On that basis he asked if the detectors could be reinstated and regular monitoring introduced?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member advised that the levels recorded in Prestbury High Street were within the safe limit but he took the point that monitoring needs to be consistent. He could not comment on why the detectors were taken away but he would investigate and provide a written response to Councillor Payne. He added that they were awaiting the 2016/17 data from Defra but the general trend in pollution levels was downwards.</p>
4.	Question from Councillor Chris Ryder to the Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay
	<p>You have decided to use 'Blanchere Illuminations' to provide new Christmas lighting in some areas within our town, which no doubt many families, shoppers and visitors to Cheltenham will thoroughly enjoy. Could you please inform me if these Illuminations have been purchased outright, hired in on a fixed price, or on a lease hire scheme.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Following a tender exercise, a 3 year lease arrangement with Blanchere Illuminations has been agreed which will provide a new illuminated display for Christmas 2017. The tender exercise has been led by the Cheltenham BID who have also contributed their own funding.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Ryder commented that it was a brilliant result but wanted clarification on the cost to the council.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member advised that £34,400 had been transferred from the planned maintenance budget to cover the council's contribution to the cost of the lights.</p>
5.	Question from Councillor Chris Ryder to the Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay
	<p>If Cheltenham Borough Council Arle Nursery land were to be removed from Green Belt status to a Brown Field site and sold for future development, would this administration consider ring fencing a proportion of the sale monies to go back into providing a decent sized 'holding/working' area for our Gardening team to be able to continue maintaining our Parks & Gardens to the Horticultural Excellence that we have grown accustomed to whether that be working with sustainable plants in the future and/or our vibrant bedding planting that once again has just recently achieved a 'Gold' accolade for Imperial Gardens in the 'Heart of England in Bloom Campaign'.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The project team are currently looking at alternative council owned sites that would be suitable for this purpose. The business case is looking into a number of options and will factor in the cost of any potential solutions identified.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question Councillor Ryder asked if the Cabinet Member would agree that morale of the gardening staff was important and as such a proper replacement working area would be found for them and not just a corner of the depot.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member reassured Councillor Ryder that the staff would not be just put in a corner somewhere and with all their equipment this would not be feasible anyway. A suitable venue would be found.</p>
6.	Question from Councillor Bickerton to the Leader, Councillor Jordan
	<p>Having received information from the GCC Head of Education Tim Browne and the Deputy Head at Balcarras School we are told there is a need for a sizeable new through school (years 4 to 16), two forms of primary and six of secondary, totalling 1260 to 1320 pupils. Southern Cheltenham is the search area for the location of this new school. It is of great concern that GCC seem to be deciding the location of the school in isolation given their track record in planning matters, the incompetence demonstrated over the County Incinerator comes to mind. Our concern is the logic of placing another large school close to Bournside School and avoiding putting parents and children into the traffic congestion.</p> <p>Could we have some assurance than CBC Councillors and Planning Officers will be able to have some influence at an early stage in this important decision?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The Planning Policy team are currently working with the education and property teams of GCC to properly understand the analysis of need for a new secondary and primary school at South Cheltenham and where this could be delivered. We are seeking to ensure that any such development will be fully consulted on and considered within the Cheltenham Plan and a suitable allocation made if required.</p> <p>The policies around the delivery of new schools are complicated. It is likely that any new school would not be delivered by GCC and as such CBC would be the determining authority on any future planning application.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Bickerton asked to know the names of the officers dealing with this issue.</p> <p>The Leader advised that Tracey Crews was the Lead Officer and he would be happy to supply Councillor Bickerton with details of the other officers involved.</p>
7.	Question from Councillor Bickerton to the Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor McKinlay
	<p>There have been reports of difficulty using the Arle Court Park and Ride due to inability to park. Parking capacity seems to be at the limit. A few questions have indicated possible reasons for the change with the use of free parking by GCHQ staff and the huge BMW regional HQ, plus the changes to the 99 bus service for NHS staff. Is the council aware of the problem and are there any solutions?</p>

	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I was not aware of the extent of the issues identified at the Arle Court Park and Ride and the Council does not appear to have received any complaints from the public about this issue.</p> <p>I'm sure that Cllr Bickerton is aware that the Park and Ride facility is operated by GCC and it is likely that any concerns would have been directed to them.</p> <p>I am happy to relay any specifically evidenced complaints to colleagues at the county council.</p>
8.	Question from Councillor Bickerton to the Leader, Councillor Jordan
	<p>The Leckhampton Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan is moving forward at a pace with public consultation anticipated this autumn, compliant and in step with the JCS and the Cheltenham Local Plan. One outstanding issue is the highly valued Cheltenham gateway views from the A46 Shurdington Road of Leckhampton Hill, the Cotswold Escarpment and AONB. This was one of the refusal reasons for the Bovis Miller 650 application by the CBC Planning Committee and picked up again at the JCS Examination in Public by Inspector Ord in her Interim Report, '<i>Additionally, there are important views from the A46 Shurdington Road across the site onto the Cotswolds Hills, the most spectacular being from the junction with Kidnappers Lane</i>^[115]. We are aware of Tewkesbury Council promoting their town as a walking centre, opening up new footpaths and routes around the town to attract visitors, we have the same objectives with a Cheltenham Country Park theme working closely with Miller Homes and CBC Planning Officers. Inspector Ord is currently recommending 200 homes onto the northern fields at Leckhampton with sympathetic development and regard to the high landscape value and sensitivity, but of course there is always pressure on housing numbers and we are considering sacrificing these views to attain increased housing density. The unobstructed views up to Leckhampton Hill and Cleeve Hill have been described as an invitation to visitors but what value do the Council place on this intangible?</p> <p>Could the Leader of the Council please give some guidance on how much importance we as a neighbourhood planning team should attach to these views in our planning policy?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The preservation of views into and out of the site will be an important part of masterplanning of the location, both at pre-application and as part of the conditions for allocation in the Cheltenham Plan. The appeal inspector's comments on views in regard to the refusal of the 650 scheme, as well as those of JCS inspector will be material considerations when determining any planning proposal or allocation in this area.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Bickerton requested that his photographs be included in the minutes for this item.</p> <p>The Leader noted this request.</p>

	 
9.	Question from Councillor Willingham to Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles, Councillor Clucas
	Does the Cabinet Member for Healthy Lifestyles share my concerns that the swingeing Conservative cuts to our beloved NHS are leading to treatment choices being made on cost, with cheaper options that may not lead to the best clinical outcomes being preferred over more expensive treatments that can lead to better clinical outcomes?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Yes
10.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Coleman
	Why is it that we have a bag to recycle cardboard and not another box with a lid? The box would keep the cardboard dry, whereas the bag, with its partial covering, leads to wet cardboard; does that not affect its recycling value?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>As a result of seeing the way in which cardboard is successfully collected in neighbouring and other local authorities, this bag is considered to be an excellent option. A similar type of bag used by the Forest of Dean was displayed at the full briefing to Council as part of the official launch of the new service on 24th July, so opportunities for questions were given to Members there.</p> <p>It's important to keep cardboard separate for the new recycling collections and the bag has a weighted bottom and Velcro flap to keep the worst of the rain out.</p> <p>The bags can be easily stored in one of the recycling boxes when not in use meaning that households with space restrictions can also take part in the collection service.</p> <p>In addition, the value of cardboard isn't dramatically affected by it being wet and the moisture actually helps the compaction equipment on the vehicle meaning that a greater amount of cardboard can be carried compared to when it is dry.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson asked why the blue recycling bag was not used for general recycling materials which would not be affected by getting wet and put cardboard in the recycling box with a lid so its value would not be diminished.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member advised that the cardboard schemes had been introduced to cope with packaging for flatpack furniture and Amazon and more waste can be fitted in a blue bag than in a green box. He added that there had been a large-scale public consultation as part of the development of the new schemes and there had been a Member Seminar in July and he now encouraged Councillor Nelson to get on board with the scheme and what it was trying to achieve.</p>
11.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Coleman
	<p>I have not received any revised calendar (unlike 23,000 other homes across the town) yet my new collection date means it will be 3 weeks before my recycling is collected, encouraging residents to simply put any excess recycling into their rubbish bin. Is that correct or is it another mistake that has yet to be corrected? This problem was never highlighted within the Member's seminar or media stories.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Not all households have received a revised calendar, only the ones which have been identified as needing to receive the updated version. For all other households the original calendar is accurate and shows the scheduled dates when refuse, recycling and food waste will be collected.</p> <p>Residents like you who are experiencing longer than 2 weeks before their first refuse or recycling collection are being asked to present any side waste in black sacks alongside their refuse bin and additional recycling in cardboard boxes alongside their recycling receptacles and everything will be collected. Households may also choose to take additional refuse or recycling to the Swindon Road Household Recycling Centre if they don't want to wait for the first new collection.</p> <p>In addition, the Council has taken the decision to instruct Ubico to make collections of refuse and recycling in certain areas on Saturday 21st October for the households which are most affected by the change and are having to wait between 22 and 26 days for their first new refuse or recycling collection, which means that the longest any resident will have to wait for their collection will be 3 weeks.</p> <p>The change to the new collection rounds will result in a more efficient service, providing long terms benefits to the council and to our residents. After 27th October, normal collection rounds will resume, with all waste and recycling being collected fortnightly.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson was concerned about the long wait for some households before their waste and recycling was collected under the new scheme. Since he had raised this question on Tuesday he understood residents had received a further letter on Friday</p>

	<p>from Councillor Coleman highlighting this problem and saying that an additional collection would now be arranged. That made at least three letters of explanation going out across the town and he asked how many others had been sent out that ward councillors had not been told about?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member advised that the purpose of the route utilisation scheme was to make routes more efficient and ultimately to save council tax payers money. In planning this change it was inevitable that some people may have to wait longer for their collection during the changeover but the advice from professionals had been that residents would tolerate this one-off delay. The administration had reviewed the advice and felt that it was not appropriate for Cheltenham residents and it was now affordable to put on an additional collection for those residents affected. Relevant ward members had been briefed and he hoped that all members would support this decision.</p>
12.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Coleman
	<p>You have been keen to lead the introduction of the new recycling scheme, with its seminars, Council debates and multiple media stories. Why then did you not take responsibility for the mistakes in the glossy recycling calendar? As you signed a letter introducing the scheme, why did you not sign the letter explaining the 23,000 errors?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>A whole-scale system re-design of this scale is not the responsibility of or organised by a single individual but is run as a project. The calendar sent out to residents was subject to a number of checks by the project team however regrettably an error in some of the calendar dates was not picked up. Clearly it is regrettable that an error occurred and in the circumstances it was felt important that the letter of apology came from the Chief Executive.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson asked why the Cabinet Member had not signed the second letter when he had signed the first and the third and suggested that this was because it could have damaged the Cabinet Member's town wide political credibility, an issue of concern for anyone contemplating standing as a member of Parliament for Cheltenham.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member acknowledged there had been a mistake that had been dealt with and he was happy to take responsibility for that as the Cabinet Member. The ExecBoard had decided that the letter should go out in an officer's name and he praised the Chief Executive for putting her name to it.</p>
13.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Coleman
	<p>Will he promise that no decision will be made about the future of our popular seasonal flowers in the centre of town without carrying out a proper public consultation?</p>

	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>As you are well aware, this Administration is always keen to ensure that the views of all Cheltenham residents are heard.</p> <p>In respect of this project, there have already been a number of consultation events with stakeholders, including a visit to a town where sustainable planting is working very well, as well as two petitions being published on the Council website. We remain absolutely committed to listening to what people say.</p> <p>This issue is a sensitive one and there are residents on both sides of the argument. It is therefore particularly important that everyone contributing to the debate do so with a full understanding of the issue. We as Members have an important role to play in ensuring our constituents have access to all of the information and I am sure that as a result of the Members Briefing last week you will now feel able to explain the arguments for and against moving to sustainable planting, particularly the widely acknowledged environmental benefits, to your constituents.</p> <p>You may also agree with me that it would be beneficial for you to signpost constituents who approach you about this issue to the Council's website where further information, together with photographs, can be found.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson questioned why a full public consultation had not been carried out and asked whether the real reason was because the Cabinet Member recognised the strength of feeling on this matter and his mind was closed to genuine democratic debate and consideration of alternative solutions.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member responded that this was an extraordinary suggestion given the extensive consultation on projects he had been involved in as a Cabinet Member including the crematorium and the Pitville Park Lane scheme. The project would consult fully on the plans for Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens should there be any recommendations for a change in planting scheme.</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay</p>
	<p>I understand that Bloor Homes sponsored the recent Tour of Britain cycling event in Cheltenham. What form did that sponsorship take and how much money was provided as part of the sponsorship deal?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>All sponsorship opportunities were set out in a brochure published on the Cheltenham Festival of Cycling website:</p> <p>https://cheltenhamcyclingfestival.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TourOfBritain_Cheltenham_Sponsorship_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>Consultants APT Marketing & PR were appointed by CBC to negotiate and contract all sponsorships. The Bloor sponsorship was a value of</p>

	<p>£45,000 + VAT and provided the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local naming rights, (The Bloor Homes Cheltenham Festival of Cycling; incorporating OVO Energy Tour of Britain) • Painted bike adverts • Soft banners • Lamppost pennants • Imperial gardens stand • Goody bag insert • Digital package • Press pack insert • £5,000 allocated to hospitality. <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson was pleased to see the success of the event. However he asked the Cabinet Member whether she agreed with him that there were potential conflicts of interest for Members and Officers in the council receiving sponsorship from Bloor Homes whose application to build over 4,000 homes at Elms Park was currently under active consideration by officers? Had this potential risk been assessed?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member welcomed the letter of support from the local MP. She acknowledged her frustration that the Cabinet were criticised for doing nothing but when they stepped out of the box and put on an event such as the Tour of Britain they were criticised for asking local businesses to be a part of it. She reassured members that a private company ATP marketing had been appointed to undertake all the negotiations on sponsorship deals.</p>
Question from Councillor Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay	
	<p>Have any discussions taken place with developers, agents or any other third party outside the Council about the sale of Arle Nursery?</p>
Response from Cabinet Member	
	<p>The Council has not been in any discussion with any developer, agent or third party regarding a potential sale of Arle Nursery. However, following the comments of the planning inspector and the suggestion that the local plan re-designates the planning classification for Arle Nursery site and two adjoining sites, one in the ownership of the County Council and the other in a private ownership, discussions between the three land owners have taken place so as to best serve the local plan process.</p> <p>Valuation advice has been obtained assuming the planning re-designation of the site is approved in order to support the development of the business case options for planting and the nursery.</p> <p>Initial discussions with Cheltenham Borough Homes as a vehicle for potential housing development have also taken place.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson suggested that minds were already made up on the seasonal planting scheme as the Cabinet were determined to sell off the nursery.</p>

	The Cabinet Member reassured members that no decision had been made on the sale of the nursery or on the future planting scheme.
16.	Question from Councillor Harman to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Coleman
	Can the Cabinet Member outline the Council's plans for electric or hybrid vehicles in the council's fleet? Will he also consider a strategy to install electric charging points in for example Borough Council owned Car Parks or other locations in Cheltenham?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>CBC has very few fleet vehicles, as most of these are now operated by our partners at Ubico and Cheltenham Borough Homes.</p> <p>Considering the efficiency of new vehicles is already something which is taken account of during the procurement process, which also needs to be flexible to ensure that the chosen option is the best fit for the required business need.</p> <p>Cllr Harman will be aware that CBC has already installed four electric vehicle charging points within CBC car parks, two at Town Centre East and two in Regent Arcade.</p> <p>In addition, we have worked with GCC to secure the installation of a further two charging points which are located at the top end of Montpellier street.</p> <p>We will consider the option of installing further charging points as the Cheltenham Parking Strategy is rolled out, but these are not cheap to provide and with improved battery technology, we have been advised by our consultants that it is likely that most vehicle charging will increasingly take place at people's homes.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Harman asked when the car parking strategy would be available?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member advised that this would be in the coming months but he could not give an exact timescale but suggested the New Year would be a suitable target.</p>
17.	Question from Councillor Harman to Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles, Councillor Flo Clucas
	In December last year I asked the Cabinet Member if she would consider providing or promoting with partners, a seasonal ice rink which are popular attractions elsewhere. Can she please update the Council on any progress?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>CBC would be keen to help facilitate the installation of a seasonal ice rink as we recognise the value that this would bring to Cheltenham, particularly at Christmas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC would need to work with a commercial partner who was

	<p>prepared to accept the financial risk; CBC alone would not be prepared to accept the financial risks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council did begin discussions with a commercial partner last year but this did not come to fruition. • Gloucester is fortunate to have Peel Group that are able to support the popular ice rink at Gloucester Quays. • We will continue to search for a commercial partner and I would be happy to update Cllr. Harman as necessary. <p>In the meantime, we are continuing to make plans for our Christmas Lights switch on 25th November, with new lights and exciting programme of events being delivered in a collaboration between the Council and Cheltenham BID.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Harman asked the Cabinet member whether she thought it was a good idea in principle?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member agreed that it was something she would love to see in Cheltenham and it had been looked at seriously but there were doubts about its economic viability. There was already a rink in Gloucester nearby which required significant levels of funding and another organisation had looked at an ice rink for Cheltenham but rejected it as too expensive.</p>
18.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>Changes to Oriol Road junctions/lights appear to be causing significant delays of up to 40 minutes for cars leaving Regents Arcade car park. I thought that one of the aims of the Cheltenham Transport Plan (CTP) was to improve access to Regents Car Park? These delays do not bode well for Christmas shoppers or the introduction of the later CTP phases and do not inspire confidence in our council's plans.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>We have been advised by GCC as highways authority that generally phase 2 of the Cheltenham Transport Plan has resulted in no discernible change in traffic flows around the town.</p> <p>As you point out there has been intermittent queuing of traffic egressing from Regent Arcade. This may be a result of the success of this phase in getting vehicles off the network and into the car park, but equally part of the problem of a delayed full implementation.</p> <p>Either way, we and GCC are fully aware of the frustration that this situation is causing and highways colleagues have been undertaking measures to mitigate the impact of this unwanted outcome. GCC are exploring other actions with anticipated implementation before the Christmas period.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson asked the Cabinet Member how confident he was that a contingency solution would be</p>

	<p>implemented before the Christmas period.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member was reasonably confident given that he had been given reassurance from his county council colleagues. The latest plan was to put in place a camera to monitor the egress from the car park and automatically trigger a red light at the junction to allow more traffic to exit when there was a build-up.</p>
19.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>Why has the Cheltenham Transport Plan and the Boots Corner phase been delayed from this Autumn to June 2018? Many residents might fear that this delay, to just after the Borough elections next May, is firm proof that the proposals from will be unpopular, controversial and have an adverse impact on many wards with Lib Dem councillors (such as St Paul's).</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The timing decision rests entirely with GCC as the highways authority, with whom discussions did take place. GCC had concerns over implementation impacting upon race week so determined that June would be more opportune for the Boots Corner trial as it also coincides with lower traffic flows. It also allows the implementation of phase 3 in Royal Well and time for monitoring before any Boots Corner trial in line with both TRO and GCC cabinet decisions.</p> <p>If, however, it is a party political rather than practical point being made perhaps you should address your question to GCC and its Conservative administration.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson advised that at a seminar he had attended recently about how to make traffic free spaces in the centre of towns, it had been suggested quite strongly that the benefit of shared public spaces had been overhyped and there was a danger for vulnerable people. Would the Cabinet Member therefore review plans for Boots Corner and perhaps consider banning all traffic and having a fully pedestrianised town centre?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member acknowledged that shared space needed careful introduction and the success of any scheme depended on limiting the number of vehicles and their speed. In his view vehicles should be limited to a fast walking pace. He could not go into any more detail at this stage due to delays by GCC but he had given his personal backing to the scheme for a long-time and if he had his way it would be happening now.</p>
20.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	<p>Please could he provide an update on Project SOLACE and its multi-agency approach to reduce rough sleeping on our streets.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The Solace 'go live' date is dependent upon the team leader receiving vetting clearance through the police and CBC's agile teams' moving to the</p>

	<p>new ground floor delivery hub, where they will be located alongside police colleagues.</p> <p>The council's lead officer for Solace, is presenting an update to O&S on 27th November which will summarise how the implementation is progressing.</p> <p>The council's ASB caseworker continues to work with partners engaging with rough sleepers and people existing on our streets.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson said he was disappointed that SOLACE had still not been implemented and there were still rough sleepers on the streets with all their inherent problems. Would the Cabinet member be prepared to give this a higher priority?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member reassured members that rough sleeping was a very high priority but there were many strands to the work which the council was undertaking with partners and the introduction of SOLACE was only one part of the jigsaw. He was pleased that Cabinet had taken decisions which had prioritised the needs of homeless people and the council would continue to work with the police on SOLACE but for the police this was one of their many priorities.</p>
21.	Question from Councillor Nelson to Cabinet Member Development, Councillor McKinlay
	What cycle lane road improvements have been introduced in Cheltenham over the last 4 years?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Cycle lanes are the responsibility of GCC as highway authority and they have been asked for an answer to this question. As yet nothing has been received but will be forwarded when it arrives.</p> <p>Councillor Nelson requested that a written response be provided to all members when available.</p>
22	Question from Councillor Nelson to Leader, Councillor Jordan
	When will the future of North Place and Portland Street car parks be resolved? How much car parking income has the Council lost since these sites were sold? How much New Homes Bonus and Council Tax has been lost due to the failure to build homes on these sites?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The car parking revenue for the site prior to sale was £350,000 net per annum. Whilst the Council is no longer in receipt of the income from the car park, it has benefited from a significant capital receipt of £7.8m in December 2014.</p> <p>The permitted scheme for North Place was for a 65,000 sq. ft. super market plus 605 car parking spaces, 300 of which as a public car park but no homes.</p> <p>The permitted development on Portland street was for a housing scheme of 143 homes. It is difficult to estimate the level of new homes bonus and</p>

council tax since the planned timing of delivery of the housing element and the council tax banding of the units was not determined.

The council no longer has a controlling interest in the either site. However, we acknowledge the importance of this site to Cheltenham and officers have actively been engaging with the developers in working towards the regeneration of both sites. The council understands that complex negotiations between the developers and potential 'end users' are taking place and we are anticipating that the developers will be coming forward with an alternative deliverable proposal shortly. CBC has recently submitted a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund to assist with unlocking the housing development on Portland Street.

In a supplementary question Councillor Nelson asked the Leader whether he regretted that the contract for the sale of North Place and Portland Street had not included a penalty clause which would have allowed the council to clawback the loss of car parking income from the failure to build the planned multistorey car park?

The Leader advised that the site had been sold to Freemans and Auger Buchler and it was unfortunate that Morrisons had walked away from the deal and Skandia had also decided to move their business abroad. The council was working hard with the owners to bring forward a suitable development.

9. PETITION TO RETAIN THE FLOWER DISPLAYS IN IMPERIAL GARDENS AND THE PROMENADE LONG GARDENS

Fiona Wild, petitioner, was invited to address Council. She highlighted that Cheltenham was renowned for its colourful town centre which was a major asset attracting visitors and their friends and family to return thereby boosting the local economy.

She referred to the growth in the Festivals and the compromise reached 6 years ago allowing them the use of Imperial Gardens while the floral planting, which this organisation wanted removed entirely, was retained, but in a slightly different position.

In terms of the buzzword "sustainable" she said this meant herbaceous planting would be out of season for at least 8 months of the year. The public were seduced by colour but with wild planting, there was often an even shorter flowering season and which would then turned into a brown, withered mess.

Mrs Wild highlighted that last month, Imperial Gardens won the Parks and Open Spaces Gold Award for horticulture, environmental responsibility & community participation. Lying in a formal setting, Imperial and the Long Gardens were best suited to formal planting. Whilst bedding plants required replacing twice a year, they provided colour for most of that time.

Mrs Wild said that Cheltenham needed to vie with comparable towns, for instance, Bath, Stratford and Tewkesbury, and not destroy one of its main attractions for short-term economic gain. Whilst bedding plants did not necessarily encourage wildlife, if all the other parks in Cheltenham were given over to wild and sustainable planting there would be plenty of places for birds, bees and other wildlife to thrive.

Mrs Wild felt that if the council's nursery was sold, several of the devoted parks & gardens staff would lose their jobs and she questioned whether that was a satisfactory way to thank them for their painstaking work over the years. The hanging baskets would be filled with plants bought from elsewhere, still at considerable cost. Whilst some gardeners may be retrained in a different style of gardening, a consultant would apparently need to be hired to advise on what to plant instead and also to redesign the gardens which would incur more expense. She felt that bedding plants for these central areas may as well be bought with that money.

The council was already spending a considerable sum on replacing the admittedly below-par Christmas lights. These may encourage visitors over the Christmas period but colourful flowers encouraged them to come throughout the year.

Finally, she once again urged the Council to maintain the formal floral planting in Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment thanked the organiser of the petition for her commitment and for taking the time to attend the debate today. He highlighted that he always acted in the best interests of the town and wished to assure the public that no decision had been made in relation to the issue. However, it was important that the council considered all its assets across the town longer term. He highlighted that this was not about cuts to services or saving money but the aim was to keep the extent of the planting, but with consideration of other planting styles that would help to achieve the following aims :

- A move to a more modern style of planting using flowering perennials that gives year round interest
- Increase in levels of local biodiversity, benefiting pollinating insects
- Reduction of natural resources in the production and maintenance of the displays (water, topsoil and energy)
- Reduction in levels of maintenance i.e. does not require lifting and replanting twice per year, and continuous watering during the summer months.
- Greater tolerance to year round weather conditions and damage.

He also emphasised that hanging baskets and containers did not form part of the review which was focussed on considering assets and making a decision with regard to either investing heavily in the asset or disposing of it. He informed that a series of stakeholder events had been undertaken as well as visits to other local authorities which had moved towards more sustainable planting regimes. A Member seminar had also been well attended. Ultimately a Cabinet report would come forward for decision. He gave the assurance that the opinions expressed in the full debate and those from the other events would inform Cabinet. Finally he referred to an amendment to the recommendations as follows :

This Council notes the Cabinet's undertaking to hold a consultation should there be any proposal to change the existing seasonal planting regime in Imperial Gardens and the Promenade Long Gardens.

The following points were included in the debate :

- Members recognised that floral heritage in the town's parks and gardens was important to residents and visitors alike and the proposed changes to the planting regime had clearly raised significant concerns for a large number of the public, evidenced by the petition which had attracted an unprecedented 2.5k signatures in just 3 weeks. Members acknowledged that it was right that the council undertook an extensive review of its assets but there was clearly passion across the political spectrum and among the general public on this issue. It was vital therefore that the public became fully involved in this issue via an informed consultation.
- The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny suggested that a scrutiny task group could be formed to involve all Councillors and invite stakeholders including the petitioners which would give confidence to all that proper consideration of the matter had been given.
- Concern was expressed by a number of members that the recent Member seminar had been somewhat biased. Members had highlighted in that forum that the proposal should be subject to the widest possible consultation and on the basis of a full business case.
- A Member suggested that there should be more investment in the nursery and gave examples of other councils who had done so- Leeds, Nottingham, Birmingham. It could act more commercially, engage in more contracts and be opened up to the general public. Bedding plants were no longer being sold to residents. The nursery had, in his view, great potential to be used as a visitor centre too, hosting educational tours and a training facility, particularly for those with learning difficulties whilst still concentrating on the core business of plants. This could bring wide social benefits. Another Member highlighted the missed opportunity in investing in the nursery in 2013 and it was asked whether it could consider contacting the Chamber of Commerce and other businesses to sponsor parks and gardens as was done with roundabouts but undertaking it as a council rather than via a marketing company.
- Many Members would give their support to a scheme of alternative sustainable planting outside of the core area i.e. to maintain the existing planting regime in Imperial and the Long Gardens, as they recognised that perennial planting could have its place in the town. They gave the example of planting around the Holst statue which was both creative and imaginative. Many felt however that perennial planting did however lack structure and would not be appropriate in the Long Gardens and Imperial Gardens. It was also highlighted that sustainable planting still required maintenance in terms of weeding and the gardens would still in any case require delimiting.
- A Member questioned what the cost of the contract would be to outsource 301 baskets to the town and the 40 black planters from Cheltenham in Bloom. A Member also asked what the number and value of the contracts to other local authorities was and why the council had

stopped selling to the public ? The Director Resources undertook to respond to this question after the meeting.

The Leader said the council was proud of its parks and gardens and proud of the way they were maintained and enhanced. He acknowledged that whatever changes were made these would be of high quality. He recognised the need for informed debate. He highlighted that climate change should also be considered when thinking about a future planting regime and noted that sustainable planting was a criteria for entering the Britain in Bloom competition.

The Head of Law was invited to address Council on the question raised by a Member as to whether Council could request Cabinet to defer this matter to Council. He informed that ultimately this was an executive matter and therefore the decision lay with Cabinet. However, it was the choice of Cabinet as to who it engaged with in reaching its final decision and as part of that engagement it could therefore decide to involve Council.

The following amendment was therefore proposed by Councillor Bickerton, seconded by Councillor Nelson :

A formal request be made to Cabinet to return this matter to Council for further debate and decision after a full public consultation and for additional information provided.

A Member acknowledged the strength of feeling in the petition debate and the huge public interest it had generated. However, he felt that the residents in the ward he represented were not concerned about flowers but rather about universal credit. This was therefore not his priority at the current time.

A Member urged other Members not to be afraid of more sustainable planting which could be colourful and produce better, creative gardens. The role of sustainable planting in terms of wildlife, particularly bees was also highlighted.

In response to a comment from a Member the Cabinet Member Finance confirmed that sponsorship was raised via marketing on roundabouts which amounted to £34k. In terms of sales from the nursery these had reduced as other local authorities were not purchasing the same quantity as they had done. When the last review of the nursery took place it had been identified that £2 million ¹was required to be invested. It was therefore appropriate that the long term future of the asset be considered.

The Mayor thanked Members for a wide and varied debate.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment stated that he would be happy to incorporate the proposed resolution into the substantive.

Prior to Members voting on the substantive the Head of Law, reiterated that even though Council would have the opportunity to make a decision the final decision on the matter would be made by the Executive, i.e. Cabinet.

¹ The figure that had been quoted by Councillor R Hay should have been £1.25 M and not £2M

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT

- 1. Officers consider the issues raised by the petition as part of developing options on the future approach to planting in Cheltenham's public realm.**
- 2. Cabinet's undertaking to hold a consultation should there be any proposal to change the existing seasonal planting regime in Imperial Gardens and the Promenade Long Gardens be noted.**
- 3. A formal request be made to Cabinet to return this matter to Council for further debate and decision after a full public consultation and for additional information provided.**

The Council adjourned at 4.35pm and resumed at 4.55 pm.

10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Harman introduced the annual report as the chair of the Overview and Scrutiny committee. He thanked the Vice Chair Councillor Walklett and Councillor Payne who worked with him as a strong team coordinating the committee's work. O&S had received presentations from the Cheltenham Trust, the BID, the Festivals and Stagecoach and noted that one of their most successful visits was to hold their meeting at the St Georges and St Vincent's Centre and the committee had been important in terms of the Changing Places facilities supported by the Cabinet Member. He finished by encouraging all members to raise any matters with the scrutiny committee.

Although he had no criticism of the work of O&S, a member did wish to raise a concern about the change of position of the current chair of O&S who since he had been appointed at Council, had taken a position as Cabinet Member at the county council. Scrutiny had since looked at a number of issues which involved the county council and he suggested that the chair should have withdrawn from any discussions. He gave Stagecoach, devolution and broadband as examples where the county council would have been directly involved in decisions on these issues. Ubico was another area that had been scrutinised where the county council would be making a decision on what happens to waste and Councillor Harman was now the Executive member of the Health and Well Being Board. He commended the fact that the Council had in its Constitution that the O&S committee is chaired by an opposition member but he encouraged the opposition to consider who is most suitable for that position and he suggested that it was inappropriate for Councillor Harman whilst he was a Cabinet Member at GCC. However well he carried out his role he had a clear pecuniary declarable interest in some of the items detailed in the annual report.

The vice chair of O&S, Councillor Walklett, took on board the comments raised but he had not experienced any difficulties due to Councillor Harman's role on the county council. If anything did come up in the future he would bear in mind the comments made. Generally he felt the committee was performing a pretty strong scrutiny role.

In response Councillor Harman agreed to look into it but emphasised that he had been chosen by the opposition group to carry out the role for this municipal year and unless it was a serious issue he wish to carry on until then. He was not

aware of any conflict but if he felt there was at any time he would take advice from officers.

Another member felt the challenge was reasonable but close working between this council and GCC was necessary and he suggested that the advantage of the chair of O&S being in a position of influence on the GCC Cabinet shouldn't be dismissed.

One member commented about the readability of the annual scrutiny report and suggested that the accounts of each working group needed to go into more detail, particularly on some of the challenges they had faced during the course of a scrutiny task group and the difficult questions they had raised. Another member suggested the requirement for detail could be covered by inserting an electronically link to the relevant scrutiny reports.

Another member suggested the annual work programme should be circulated with the annual report. Another member suggested that Council should also be informed of the work carried out by Cabinet member working groups. Whilst noting that they were not part of the scrutiny function they could provide some reassurance to the scrutiny process.

The Mayor raised concerns about the lack of women on any of the working groups and suggested that one of the reasons might be that unlike the old committees, meetings of task groups were not diarised in advance and were therefore none known commitment. Diversity of membership was important and perhaps the scrutiny structure should be reviewed to facilitate this.

In conclusion, Councillor Harman noted the points raised and payed particular thanks to Saira Malin and the rest of democratic services for their continued support to the scrutiny function.

11. NOTICES OF MOTION

Motion A

Councillor Savage left the room for this item.

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Clucas and seconded by Councillor Harvey:

"That this Council, mindful of the distress, concern and inconvenience to Cheltenham residents, that would ensue should Cheltenham A&E close, reiterates its opposition to any proposed closure or downgrading of A&E facilities at our local hospital. Council recognises the high esteem in which residents hold the Accident and Emergency Department and the staff who work there.

It further calls on the Chair of the Trust to confirm that any proposals in relation to the future of Cheltenham's A&E will be discussed with the Council and shared with the people of Cheltenham to ensure that their voice is heard.

In addition, Council thanks the Accountable Officer at the CCG for her prompt response in ensuring that questions raised by councillors in relation to recent reports, were answered.

It further calls on the Member of Parliament to support the retention of a full range of A&E services at Cheltenham Hospital.”

In proposing the motion Councillor Clucas advised that from 19 October acute orthopaedic cases requiring surgery would be referred to Gloucester hospital. This was a further example of the ongoing loss of specialism from Cheltenham which made it difficult to attract medical staff to work in Cheltenham where there would be limited opportunities to develop their specialist skills. She provided some statistics from A&E which illustrated that both hospitals were struggling to provide the necessary facilities during the day and after 8 p.m. each evening when Cheltenham patients had to be diverted to Gloucester until 8 a.m. in the morning. Currently any gaps in the service were being filled by agency staff. These problems would only increase as Cheltenham had an older population than the average in England and countryside there was an increasing demand for A&E services as pressure on GP services increased. She did not consider the urgent care centre staffed by nurses and GPs was an adequate substitute. She urged the people of Cheltenham and Gloucestershire to understand what was going on and to make their voice heard to the CCG. A recent report from the Care Quality Commission had highlighted concerns about patient safety, bottlenecks in A&E, shortage of staff and medical care at night. She concluded that Cheltenham had a strong medical team and the people of Cheltenham needed to have access to those services in Cheltenham 24 hours a day. She urged members to support the motion.

Councillor Harman indicated that his group would support the motion but he would abstain as a Cabinet Member at the county council.

Councillor Nelson proposed an amendment that the two words “continue to” be added to the fourth paragraph before the word “support”. This was accepted by the proposer and therefore this became the substantive motion.

In the debate that followed all members supported the motion and made the following points:

- this was a countywide issue and the A&E services must be effective for everyone not only in Gloucester and Cheltenham but also in the outlying districts
- more use should be made of technology to enable specialist skills and advice to be shared across locations. Glos. NHS Trust had not invested in the latest technology which would facilitate this and the sharing of patients electronic records
- it was important that staff were not degraded by feeling they were being used as a political football
- there appeared to be an ongoing downgrading of services and Cheltenham which was a cause of concern and possibly a topic for the health scrutiny committee to look at
- the proposals for an urgent care centre overnight at Cheltenham was still a downgrade from full A&E services

- what plans does the CCG have to ensure that it can provide adequate services to meet the increased demand from new housing developments?
- the elephant in the room was the crisis of staffing in the NHS and the difficulty in recruiting and retaining doctors, nurses and GPs. It was no good requesting more A&E services without calling for these staffing issues to be addressed.
- The Cheltenham General hospital building was a disgrace and not an attractive place to work
- A new hospital located at junction 10 to replace both Cheltenham and Gloucester would be the best solution to support the JCS plans for 2031 and this would also support the increasing number of accidents on the M5.

In seconding the motion Councillor Harvey suggested that the A&E department at Cheltenham supported not only the population of Cheltenham but also a catchment area east of Cheltenham with a total population in the order of 250,000. Any proposals for an urgent care service would represent a downgrading of services. He was concerned that there may be deliberate under resourcing at Cheltenham and although middle grade doctors had been recruited they were being sent to Gloucester rather than Cheltenham. There was a strong campaign in Cheltenham to maintain A&E services championed by the local MP but it appeared that decisions were being taken by unaccountable bureaucrats.

In her summing up Councillor Clucas thanked members for their support and they had echoed her feeling that the people of Cheltenham required a fully fledged A&E service with a consultant in charge and appropriate levels of staff and expertise.

Upon a vote on the motion as amended was CARRIED unanimously.

MOTION B

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Savage and seconded by Councillor Harman :

This Council notes with concern the widely reported harassment, abuse and intimidation during the recent General Election campaign, including incidents of vandalism and arson here in Cheltenham.

It condemns all and any harassment, abuse or intimidation of election candidates, volunteers and those involved in the democratic process.

This council will work proactively to ensure that members of the public who wish to stand for public office are given the full support of this council and its partner organisations in exercising this fundamental right.

This council will ensure that all duly nominated electoral candidates are made aware of appropriate channels to ensure that any future incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation can be reported and investigated.

In proposing the motion Councillor Savage said that as a newcomer to politics he was finding that national politics was becoming cruder, coarser and more aggressive and vitriolic with an increased tendency for abuse and insults rather than disagreement and political debate. The reasons were complex but the rise in social media had led to the ability to behave online with anonymity in a way which would be unacceptable in real life. He noted the reference in the briefing note by the Chief Executive circulated in advance of the meeting to the fact that the House of Commons Committee on Standards in Public Life were considering this issue and hoped that it would produce robust recommendations which would apply to politicians in Cheltenham. Cheltenham was not immune to the phenomenon of abuse and intimidation and during the general election the MP had received death threats and online incitements of violence and at a lower level there had been criminal damage to property. In standing for public office to serve communities and represent the people they serve, most candidates accepted considerable professional and personal sacrifice but they should not have to accept abuse and intimidation. Politics should be for discussion and debate and disapproval but with threats and intimidation it was now running the risk of discouraging people to stand thereby undermining the integrity of the democratic system. He urged the Council to take a clear stance against this abuse and intimidation at election time and send a clear and unambiguous message that this would not be tolerated.

Councillor Savage advised Members that he had accepted an amendment to the original motion which now read as follows :

This Council notes with concern the widely reported harassment, abuse and intimidation during the recent General Election campaign, including incidents of vandalism and arson here in Cheltenham.

It condemns all and any harassment, abuse or intimidation of election candidates, volunteers and those involved in the democratic process.

This council will ensure that all duly nominated electoral candidates are made aware of appropriate channels to ensure that any incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation can be reported and investigated.

In the debate that followed Members raised the following points :

- They agreed that intimidation was outrageous and unacceptable and the way politics was conducted was of concern. Party machines did have an important function and at times they should think more about what they were doing. The easiest passion to provoke was hatred and persistent character assassination and slogans did create excitement. If the parties did not address this issue there was a danger to democracy and the language used would put people off from voting.
- It was recognised that the growth in social media allowed people to criticise anonymously and triggered abuse from a wide variety of people. It was important to ensure that democracy in Cheltenham thrived and that people were involved in debates and that the best candidates for public service were not lost.

Councillor Savage thanked Members for their input and for the Chief Executive for the briefing note provided. He acknowledged the limits in statutory powers to influence a complex issue but this motion should send a clear and unambiguous message.

Motion C

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Wilkinson and seconded by: Councillor Hobley:

This Council notes that:

Delivering the right mix of housing is a key part of Cheltenham's economic prosperity;

Ensuring young people are able to live and work in the town is vital for the future prosperity of the town, in line with the aspirations of the council's place strategy;

House prices to buy and to rent in Cheltenham are unaffordable for many younger people;

Short term tenancy agreements, at a standard of one year, reduce stability for the majority of young people who our town must retain for its future prosperity;

This discourages many younger people from moving here and remaining here in the longer term;

This promotes inbound commuting, leading to congestion and other associated problems such as poor air quality and economic inefficiency;

This is making it more difficult for businesses to recruit the right employees; and

The issue is identified by key stakeholders, including those at the recent Civic Society conference, as a key factor for the future prosperity of the town.

Council resolves to:

Explore all possible methods for delivering more affordable housing for younger people to buy, including influencing house sizes and types in new developments;

Take opportunities to work with developers to deliver shared ownership schemes;

Take opportunities to work with private sector companies that would provide longer term rental security;

Work with third sector partners on shared ownership schemes;

Explore and develop local planning policy and guidance reflecting these concerns for inclusion in the Cheltenham local plan; and

To recognise the issues of long term security in the private rental sector and affordability for first time buyers as key challenges to meet in the Cheltenham Local Plan.

In proposing the motion Councillor Wilkinson was concerned that previous generations had been able to buy their own property but this was not an option for young couples in Cheltenham today and generally life chances had diminished for young people. There was a consensus across all political parties that renting was not a good long-term solution but with current house prices in Cheltenham at eight times the local average salary, generally young people were renting for longer or were forced to move out of the town where house prices were cheaper.

Councillor Wilkinson suggested there were a number of ways in which the council would help. One way was to work with housing associations to provide housing which would not be subject to write to buy and can be rented out on a long-term basis. He had made a number of other suggestions in the motion. The consequence of not taking these actions was that young people would move to Gloucester and Cheltenham would lose momentum as a result and suffer a brain drain of young people. Businesses were already commenting that they were finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff in Cheltenham.

He observed that councillors round the chamber were not representative of the population in Cheltenham and indeed the consultation on the local plan had demonstrated a lack of responses from the under 25 age group. Therefore it was for this council to be the voice of young people and put in place what they knew young people wanted.

In the debate that followed several members felt that the central issue was the lack of social housing and that central government should require and enable local authorities to build more social housing which would then relieve pressures in the private sector. A member referred to the £2 billion of government funding for council and social housing that had been announced and urged CBH to get a share of this. Another member felt it was disgraceful that a home sold under right to buy could not be replaced on a one-to-one basis.

Members also referred to the issue of affordable housing and the importance of having a good supply of affordable homes in the town. As a planning authority a member suggested that the council should be able to influence and force the issue of affordable housing with developers whilst recognizing that they still need to make a profit. Another member suggested that young people prefer to live in the centre of town and the council should be encouraging development of brown field sites for affordable accommodation for young people.

Other members referred to the number of empty properties often bought up by developers and then left empty. One cause could be low interest rates making property a better investment than savings. One member thought it was disgraceful that a number of three bedrooled houses were left empty on local army bases. Another member suggested a possible cause could be developers waiting for planning consent and one solution would be to lobby central government to look seriously at planning legislation and how the process could be speeded up.

Councillor Wilkinson raised a point of order that in his motion he had deliberately not mentioned social housing. His motion was specifically targeted at young people in the age group 25 to 35 on a reasonable income who would never qualify for social housing.

The Cabinet Member Housing said it was great from him to have had the opportunity to work with the council's ALMO. He referred to the decades of housing shortages and a generation which had now been priced out of the market. He felt the suggestions in the motion were a good start.

Several members referred to the types of employment available to young people. There was a strong service industry in Cheltenham which often experienced difficulties in recruitment as zero hours contracts were not attractive. Fixed term contracts were also becoming more frequent and these would not support mortgage applications.

In seconding the motion Councillor Hobley emphasised that social housing was not the solution to young people's needs. He himself had moved 10 times in the space of five years and he would never be eligible for social housing. Moving frequently between rented accommodation also incurred a high volume of letting fees and used up young people's savings for a future deposit on a house. In his ward, St Paul's, there were a significant number of buy to let properties, many rented out to students and local people could not afford to buy their first or second house in the area.

In his summing Councillor Wilkinson thanked members for all their support and encouraged the council to write to government and encourage them to take some action and for the council to incorporate some solutions to the problem as part of the development of the Local Plan.

Upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

12. ANY OTHER ITEM THE MAYOR DETERMINES AS URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION

None.

Klara Sudbury
Chairman