

Cabinet

Tuesday, 7th July, 2020
6.00 - 7.00 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles), Chris Coleman (Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment), Rowena Hay (Cabinet Member Finance), Peter Jeffries (Cabinet Member Housing) and Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Development and Safety)
Also in attendance:	

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services was unable to join the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting on 9th June 2020 were unanimously approved and signed as the correct record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

Public questions (1 total)

1.	Question from Mr G. Li to the Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay
	I run a small business based at St Paul's medical centre, and missed my local government discretionary grant application window. What kind of help or redemption can you provide me with?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	This Council received funding of £1,128,000 to design a discretionary grant scheme to support local businesses. The scheme was designed jointly with Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury councils. Like other Councils we anticipated demand would be high and would exceed the limited funding available. The scheme was therefore open for applications for a limited period between 9th and 21st June 2020. Unlike the earlier grant scheme the discretionary grants were aimed at businesses that are not business ratepayers. As we didn't have details of these businesses and where they are we weren't able to contact them

	<p>directly so publicity was done via press releases, social media, the BID, LEP, MPs office and the Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>Cabinet agreed on 9th June that it may be possible to open another application window if any funding remained once all applications had been assessed and grants awarded. This won't be possible as the funding has now been allocated</p> <p>I wish we had the funding available to help Mr Li and the many other businesses that still need help but unless the Government give us additional funding we are not able to consider any more applications.</p>
	Supplementary question from Mr G. Li
	<p>There is £4.4m joint funding across Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury. By 26th of June, according to Gloucestershire County Council's website, £3.4m had been allocated to 304 businesses across the four councils. Tewkesbury has £200,000 left and started 2nd round grant application on 6th of July.</p> <p>Yesterday, Cheltenham Borough Council informed me that at this stage, there are no funds left. But in the meantime, they can't disclose information relating to how many businesses applied and how much funding is left because there is fraudulent application occurring. In the future if they have any fund left, can they please consider our application?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The £4.4m figure refers to the total amount available for all authorities in the county, with Cheltenham's own fund being £1,128,000. Although individual details of grant payments cannot be disclosed, a total of £1,105,000 has been allocated to 95 businesses in Cheltenham so far. A further £23,000 remains, but some applications which came in on time are still being assessed. Due to the limited funds available, it is highly unlikely that any funding will remain after the outstanding applications have been reviewed. If additional funding is forthcoming from the government in the future, you will be able to apply for assistance.</p>

Member questions (1 total)

1.	Question from Councillor Bernard Fisher to the Leader of the Council, Steve Jordan
	<p>Recent 'visits' by Travellers breaking into Swindon Village Playing Fields, threats being made to residents, court action, bailiffs, low loaders and clean-up of the site, have cost the Council a great deal of money.</p> <p>Would you look at the following solution? That boulders be placed around the grassed area to enable access on foot, but not for caravans. Local residents and visitors could use the car park and have access to the open space, but caravans would not be able to be sited on the fields.</p> <p>While this would require a relatively small investment, the resulting saving in bailiffs, court action, police presence, officer time and clean-up would be saved many times over.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The car park already has a robust low level metal rail around its outer edges, and a locked gate onto the grass for Ubico vehicles. In addition to this the car park entrance off the</p>

highway has a height restriction barrier with boulders placed either side. Any further placing of boulders will have the effect of restricting access to the site by Ubico maintenance vehicles, and also emergency vehicles such as ambulances that may need access to the pitches from time to time. Following the last traveller occupation of the playing field, officers have installed more secure locks, as it appears they had been able to remove the previous ones despite there being a steel shroud welded around one of them.
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5. SOCIAL VALUE POLICY

The Leader of the Council presented the report, noting that it was important to explain what exactly social value meant to the people of Cheltenham.

He emphasised that the council must seek to maximise the social value of legislation, and ensure it aligns with the council's refreshed corporate plan. When it came to procurement, for example, it was not just about financial incentives but the wider social value too. The council's aim must be to ensure that everyone thrives, but this report particularly targeted a number of key areas including children in poverty, adults with health and social care difficulties and other disadvantaged residents. He added that the council was responsible for approximately £23m in annual purchasing power and was in the process of rolling out a £100m housing program.

Its procurement policy had also recently changed in order to offer greater discretion regarding sums under £25,000. He acknowledged that it was largely coincidental that it was happening during the Covid-19 lockdown, seeing as the relevant consultation took place six months ago. However, the present situation meant it was more important than ever to consider social value and the wider consequences of council policy.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles emphasised that there was a real opportunity to equip disadvantaged residents with skills and support that will benefit them in the future. She added that young people were suffering extensively from the economic consequences of pandemic, and Cheltenham had a chance to lead the way through recovery.

The Cabinet Member Housing welcomed the report, and added that calculating social value had proved tricky in the past, so it was good that a concrete framework had been provided. He hoped that the council could reap the benefits in years to come.

The Leader thanked colleagues and officers for the work put into the report, and moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The social value policy attached as appendix 2 be agreed.

6. PAYMENT ACCESS REVIEW - THE FUTURE

The Leader of the Council presented the report, in the absence of the Cabinet Member Corporate Services. He acknowledged that a number of things that had been changing anyway had been accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis, and this

was one of them. The priority, however, remained the same – to continue providing an excellent service in whatever way customers need them, retaining the option of face-to-face services.

Cash offices had been forced to shut during the crisis, and the possibility of using the Post Office for cash payments was explored – thus simultaneously boosting the Post Office network. Officers had reported that these alternative methods worked perfectly well. He emphasised that the sooner the decision was taken, the better, as the cash offices were already closed.

Judy Hibbert, Customer and Support Services Manager, agreed that the Covid-19 crisis had made it an easy decision. The move followed national trends relating to self-service payments, and it was the right time to make the move.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment emphasised that the council must focus on its residents, and that this report did that. Services must be protected, and the way to do that was by reviewing the service offered, and streamlining and improving it where needed.

The Cabinet Member Finance added that it would particularly benefit vulnerable residents, by making key services easier to access and simpler to use.

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety agreed that the Covid-19 crisis had accelerated a number of changes in a positive way, and that he believed the new arrangements would be an improvement.

The Chief Executive added his thanks to the officers involved.

The Leader moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The cash office located at the Municipal Offices be permanently closed, as demand on the Council's payment office has been reducing year on year;**
- 2. A comprehensive communications plan be created to sign post customers to alternative payment arrangements;**
- 3. Customers that still need to pay bills in cash be offered the option of paying at Post Office locations within the borough;**
- 4. The option of making payments by cheque be phased out by December 2021, due to year on year reductions in the number of customers making payments this way.**

7. HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-23 - ACTION PLAN UPDATE 2020

The Cabinet Member Housing presented the report, noting that the Housing & Homelessness Strategy document, which was approved in 2018, remained a living document and was reviewed yearly.

He outlined the priorities and visions of the 2020 update, which included the council's £100m commitment to providing 500 new affordable homes, and the potential of the West Cheltenham Cyber Central plan to provide up to 2,000 new homes. He added that the council had made good use of existing accommodation by helping more than 20 households to downsize, by bringing empty homes back into use and by making more than 900 private sector homes safer.

A further key goal was to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness in general, with the result being that 394 households were prevented from rough sleeping – which also produced £1.5m income that these households did not realise they were entitled to. £1m funding was secured for rough sleeping, enabled them to continue providing emergency provision, while £44,000 was also secured in order to fund a new domestic abuse support officer role, as mentioned at the last Cabinet meeting.

The final key outcome was improving the health and wellbeing of communities, and he praised CBH and external partners for their work in setting up 1,800 community project activities – which, with some 4,000 volunteer hours put in, generated an estimated £10m in social value. He added that in the last year, 120 antisocial behaviour cases had been resolved, while 221 new lifelines were installed for vulnerable residents. He concluded that it had been a busy year, and he was pleased to bring the plan for the forthcoming year to Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles heartily praised the report and those involved in supporting the most vulnerable residents. The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment and the Cabinet Member Finance echoed this.

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety indicated that he was impressed by the number of different strands brought together in the report, which demonstrated the breadth of positive change that the council can bring about.

The Leader noted how topical the report was, given the importance of safe and secure housing during the Covid-19 crisis, and moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan Update for 2020 be approved.**

8. COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Leader of the Council presented the report, acknowledging that these were still very difficult times despite positive steps towards recovery. The example of Leicester showed there was no guarantee that the road out would be easy.

The Covid-19 recovery strategy was originally published back in May at the first virtual Cabinet meeting, where it took the unorthodox approach of being published before consultation had taken place. He welcomed the feedback,

particularly from Vision 21 on the topic of climate change, and stressed it was a living document with the ability to evolve as the situation changed. The changes made after consultation included strengthened climate change commitments, an increased emphasis on working with partners to improve green spaces and the High Street, and a greater focus on cultural elements of the economy.

He stressed that the council had an opportunity to lead with its New Deal for Cheltenham, but acknowledged that the amount it could progress depended on the financial situation. Further guidance was needed from the government on what local authorities could expect.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles echoed the Leader's point about working with cultural partners, and reported that they continued to be in constant contact.

The Cabinet Member Housing added that he had found it heartening that the exit strategy was taken into consideration at the very beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. The Cabinet Member Development and Safety agreed that they had been ahead of the pack in preparing its strategy, and their example had since been followed by other councils. He praised the strategy for building on Cheltenham's existing strengths rather than making unrealistic commitments.

The Leader moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The consultation on the Draft Recovery Strategy be noted;**
2. **The changes to the document as a result of engagement and feedback be noted;**
3. **Cheltenham Borough Council's Recovery Strategy in Appendix A be approved;**
4. **The review of the Recovery Strategy be delegated to the Executive Director People and Change as part of wider recovery group of officers and partners under specific workstreams;**
5. **A report on the Recovery Strategy to be provided to Overview and Scrutiny and other local or county-wide partnership boards and meetings where appropriate.**

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - ACQUISITION OF 320 SWINDON ROAD SITE

The Cabinet Member Housing presented the report, noting that the council continued to constantly look at potential sites, in conjunction with housing delivery groups. In this case, 28 homes were to be built on a site on Swindon Road that had been vacant for a long time. He stressed that the council must drive forward affordable housing opportunities wherever they crop up.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment praised both the addition of new affordable homes and the regeneration of a long-term vacant site.

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety emphasised that the Swindon Road acquisition was part of a much wider strategy involving many other sites where affordable housing would be created in the years to come.

The Leader of the Council noted an error on the agenda, where it referred to the site as being in St Paul's ward rather than Swindon Village.

The Leader moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The acquisition of the site at 320 Swindon Road be approved on a conditional basis on the terms referenced at paragraphs 1 -5 within Appendix 2;**
- 2. The development of the site for affordable housing to be owned by the Authority be approved;**
- 3. It be noted that CBH, on behalf of the Authority, will apply for planning permission and conduct procurements to select contractors to carry out the design and construction of the new housing on this site;**
- 4. It be noted that subject to the tenders for the construction of the new housing being within the budgets approved by full Council and the receipt of planning permission, the Cabinet Member – Housing will approve the number of dwellings to be provided and will authorise the award of the contracts to the successful bidders where contracts are in excess of £100,000;**
- 5. Authority be delegated to the Executive Director – Finance and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Housing to:**
 - a. submit and accept bids to Homes England (HE) for grant funding to support the delivery of new affordable housing and, subject to consultation with the Borough Solicitor, enter into required grant agreements;**
 - b. agree the tenure of the affordable housing that will be delivered on the site;**
 - c. approve the disposal of the units on a shared ownership basis, at an initial equity share appropriate to prospective purchasers.**
- 6. Authority be delegated to the Head of Property, in consultation with the Borough Solicitor, to take all necessary steps and undertake all necessary procedures, including:**
 - a. entering into any legal documents for and associated with**

the purchase of the site and disposal of constructed units on a shared ownership basis;

- b. entering into legal agreements and contracts (other than those referred to in paragraph 7(a) which do not exceed £100,000 or other documentation as may be required to implement or facilitate the development.**

10. PARTITION SCREENS IN LICENSED VEHICLES

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety presented the report.

At the last Cabinet meeting, he had announced that the decision had been made to open consultation on the question of partition screens, the results of which were outlined in the report. He noted that private hire drivers had been hit particularly hard by the Covid-19 crisis, both in terms of their business and their own safety. The council made a firm commitment to protect both drivers and members of the public who use taxis. The report did not make screens mandatory, both because there is no government legislation to do so, and because consultees were predominantly opposed to that. The result would instead be a mixed fleet, in which some vehicles have screens and some do not. He stressed that it would be up to the public to choose to use a vehicle that suits their needs, and there would be no obligation to take the taxi at the front of the rank if it does not.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment noted his surprise that most consultees had opposed making screens mandatory, considering the health benefits. He hoped that those who did install screens would make it clear to customers.

The Cabinet Member Housing added that confidence was essential, and the safer the public felt, the better.

The Leader moved to a vote, which was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. The consultation feedback be noted;**
- 2. The proposed policy attached at Appendix 2 of this report be approved.**

11. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles reported that she had met with community workshops on 3rd July, and they had done a good job in bringing together community organisations and building a supportive system. She also thanked colleagues at GCHQ for supporting this by providing data and analysis of what exactly needed doing.

She noted that a significant piece of artwork was soon to be installed at Honeybourne Place, and suggested that local primary schools could arrange visits to inspire creativity. She also reported that the council's cultural partners were keen to be prime movers in reigniting Cheltenham's economy, and added that she would meet the leaders of the Holst Birthplace Museum on 8th July to discuss their plans for the exterior of the building in the future.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment updated members on the situation with play areas and outdoor gyms, which reopened on 4th July. He thanked Ubico and the parks department for keeping them all as clean and safe as possible. He reminded residents with children to continue observing social distancing guidelines, and noted that the vast majority of the increasing number of people using parks and gardens as lockdown eases had done so responsibly.

However, there had also been some unacceptable behaviour from a small minority, including leaving rubbish and behaving noisily and antisocially. He stressed that CBC would not stand for that, and was working with police to crack down on it. He also praised the recent 'don't be a tosser' advertising campaign, which was carried out both through flyers and over social media, and was supported by members and officers. The council needed to make clear that it was on the side of the vast majority of residents who use the parks considerately and responsibly, and the communications team was working to ensure this.

The Cabinet Member Finance updated members on the situation with the discretionary grants for businesses. In total, the council received 191 grant applications from local businesses, and distributed funding from the 9th June onwards according to their five criteria of need.

The first of these was the shared workspace criteria, which applied to 68 applications totalling £605,000. Just one application related to the market traders criteria, and they received £5,000. Four applications fulfilled the B&B criteria, and received £20,000 between them, while five charities received £50,000 between them.

A further 17 applicants received £425,000 in funding, meaning that in total, £1,105,000 was allocated to 95 businesses. Some applications were rejected, while others were still being considered, with a remaining pot of £23,000 as of the 8th July.

The Cabinet Member Housing noted that government announcements regarding the recovery had included interesting points relating to housing, but lacked firm guidance on the topic. CBH and CBC's housing officers remained on standby for more detail. He hoped that central government would not overlook local authorities as a delivery mechanism for housing, which would form a key part of any recovery.

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety added that the town centre team had been working with businesses in Montpellier and Regent Street on a scheme to narrow the highway. By reducing parking, the space available for tables and chairs would increase, which should make social distancing easier. He echoed the Cabinet Member Housing's point that they were still waiting on more detailed guidance from central government.

The Cabinet Member Finance added some feedback that the discretionary grant program has received from businesses helped by the funding. She emphasised that the council did the right thing by proactively distributing the funding, and thanked officers for their help in getting it done.

The Leader of the Council added that a special Cabinet meeting would take place at the end of July to consider the outturn report, ahead of the special Council meeting on the same topic.

He added that in keeping with the rest of the country, Gloucestershire County Council had published its outbreak contingency plan. He clarified that any issues around that were managed by the Health Protection Board, which would now meet weekly in order to consider the key data and react accordingly. The political oversight of that process would be carried out by the Outbreak Engagement Board, which met for the first time on 6th July and was a cross-party group including county councillors, district leaders, parish councillors and police representatives. He noted that the OEB would meet monthly or as required, and would receive regular data updates on the crisis as it developed. The more data that is made public, the better, and residents should be helped to understand the situation.

He also reported that the last meeting of the Cheltenham Development Task Force would take place soon, after ten years of work. He placed on the record his thanks to Graham Garbutt for his chairing and expertise, as well as Jeremy Williamson for his essential background work.

Chairman