

Cabinet

Tuesday, 13th October, 2020
6.00 - 7.30 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Victoria Atherstone (Cabinet Member Economy and Development), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles), Chris Coleman (Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment), Rowena Hay (Cabinet Member Finance), Peter Jeffries (Cabinet Member Housing), Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety) and Max Wilkinson (Cabinet Member Climate and Communities)
Also in attendance:	David Oakhill (Head of Planning)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr. Hegenbarth sent apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting on 15th September 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

5. DEVOLUTION AND RECOVERY WHITE PAPER

The Leader of the Council presented the report, emphasising that he did not feel it was the right time for national government to pursue local government reform. Although it was fair to say that the local government system was not perfect, he was concerned that pushing ahead with reforms now would not be wise, since the Covid recovery must be top of the agenda.

He added that power should continue to be devolved to local authorities, and suggested that previous governments had not done this enough. However, he stressed that if there were going to be changes, all options should be looked at and proper consultation must take place. A radical change of system, such as a move to being a unitary county authority, must not be imposed at short notice.

The government made a manifesto commitment in 2019 to devolution and reform, and planned to publish a White Paper in September 2020, which was

delayed to an unknown later date. The uncertainty of this situation meant that CBC must be prepared for anything that may happen in relation to it. This report therefore set aside funding, if necessary, to look at options from a practical point of view.

The Cabinet Member Economy and Development agreed that now was not the time for a major reorganisation of how CBC operated, but that it made sense to be fully prepared for any future changes that may come.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles asked about recent media coverage which had suggested that the St Paul's ward was a Covid hotspot, causing significant concern for people in the area. The Leader responded that there was no reason for particular alarm in St Paul's, and noted that the rise in figures could be mostly attributed to a minor outbreak on the university campus. It was important to stay vigilant, do what was necessary to reduce the spread of Covid, and to avoid unnecessarily alarming the public.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment added that Cheltenham residents should be concerned about the possible imposition of a rushed reorganisation. Any reorganisation must be done the proper way, with proper consultation. He praised staff for their hard work during a uniquely tough time, and suggested that central government should not seek to impose unitary status on an authority where staff already had enough on their plate.

The Cabinet Member Finance added that it was important to be pragmatic about bringing things forward. Central government had been clear about wanting to take devolution forward, and although it was on hold due to Covid, it would be unwise not to at least make provision for possible future changes, regardless of when they take place. The Cabinet Member Housing agreed that central government should not be considering major reorganisation at this time, and stressed that any final decision should be made by local people rather than imposed on them.

The vote was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The allocation of £25,000 for the purpose of addressing Cheltenham Borough Council's response to the expected publication of the Government's Devolution and Recovery White Paper be agreed;
- b) The Chief Executive be authorised to enter in to appropriate legal or other documentation as necessary to implement a) above.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES - DRAFT STRATEGY 2020-2030 AND UPDATED POLICY

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment presented the report, stressing that the borough council was committed to delivering long-term,

sustainable environmental change. This required it to act proactively to make a significant difference and deliver positive environmental services in the town. He noted that the focus was on reducing residual waste, improving recycling (especially of food waste) and reducing plastic usage. This report sought to build on this positive record, and was broken down into three sets of recommendations. The first sought approval for the draft strategy which set out the vision for the future, and outlined the targets against which it will be measured. The strategy was in draft form due to the need for public consultation.

The second set of recommendations related to the revised Environmental Services Policy, which included a strengthening of the no side waste policy in order to reduce the residual waste stream. He explained that a small number of people were regularly putting out extra bin liners or overfilled bins, putting an extra burden on crews. Overfilled bins would no longer be picked up, although he stressed that the updated policy would be enforced through public education and engagement, with a stage process involving stickers and visits to give advice. The overall goal remained to reduce the amount of residual waste sent to Javelin Park.

He noted that the sorting of recycling boxes was still a cause for concern, particularly during the Covid crisis – posing a risk to crews who had to sort items into the correct boxes themselves. The new policy sought to encourage people to sort recycling when they could into separate boxes, and was similarly based around public engagement and education. It sought to also take into account the amount of space different people had on their properties. He added that the household recycling centre on Swindon Road must not be seen as a tip for residual waste when most things could be recycled. He stressed the importance of reducing residents' reliance on black bin liners and residual waste.

The final key recommendation related to Ubico, which he praised for delivering a high quality service in a cost-effective way. Throughout the council's contract with Ubico, a value for money exercise had been going on in the background, which concluded that the contract should be extended. He stressed that he supported this, and hoped that the high quality of service could be maintained over the next 5 years.

The Cabinet Member Economy and Development praised the focus on tackling climate change both at home and locally, while the Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles praised Ubico staff, particularly those responsible for the recycling centre and doorstep collections.

The Cabinet Member Climate and Communities added that as a public-facing service, it was important to communicate changes to local people so that they were aware what was happening. He was pleased that such an important service was getting proper scrutiny and support.

The Leader of the Council thanked officers for putting the report together, and stressed that it was key to maximise recycling and minimise residual waste. He added that 120,000 people making small changes would make a huge difference overall, and endorsed the extension of the Ubico contract.

The vote was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The draft environmental services strategy 2020-2030 be approved, including the draft single use plastics strategy for public consultation and delegates authority to Managing Director Place and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Clean Green Environment, to further develop this draft strategy and an action plan, for consideration by Cabinet in 2021 following public consultation;**
2. **The revised environmental services policy supporting the authority's recognition of the climate emergency be approved, particularly relating to:**
 - 2.1 **Amendments to the no side waste and closed bin lid section as set out in the report at section 2.9**
 - 2.2 **Introduction of the incorrectly presented/unsorted recycling box section as set out in the report at section 2.16**
 - 2.3 **The reduction in single use black bags disposed of at the household recycling centre in Swindon Road to support removal of recycling from this waste stream over the next 12 months as set out in the report at section 2.22**
3. **The extension of the existing Ubico contract for the delivery of environmental services be approved for the maximum period of 5 years and authority be delegated to the Managing Director, Place and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member Clean Green Environment to:**
 - 3.1 **formally write to Ubico to implement the contract extension prior to March 2021 and to do such other steps as are necessary to carry out this recommendation and**
 - 3.2 **to work with Ubico and other partner authorities to review and update the Ubico contract documentation in readiness for a longer term partnership/contract agreement with Ubico at the end of the 5 year contract extension or sooner if appropriate.**

7. RESPONSE TO 'PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE'

The Cabinet Member Economy and Development presented the report, explaining that it highlighted the council's key concerns about the government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, which set out a plan to reform the UK

planning system in the most significant way since WW2. The White Paper cited perceived flaws within the current system, including complexity, uncertainty, speed, and system failure, and sought to reform, streamline and modernise with a focus on sustainability and the government's 'build, build, build' agenda. The proposed reforms would radically change the funding of infrastructure provision and the way land is allocated, particularly through the adoption of a zonal planning system – in which all land in England, including Cheltenham, would be categorised as being for either growth, renewal or protection.

The council's response particularly focused on the need for any reforms to address planning in its fullest sense, rather than just housing delivery. The centralisation of control over planning, including setting housing numbers for local authorities, was a particular cause for concern, as it could damage local democracy and decision-making. CBC recently relaxed local planning controls as part of the Covid recovery, through consultation with local members, and the results of this highlighted the importance of planning at the local level, as local authorities understand what their area requires. Any reforms must also put climate change front and centre, rather than as an afterthought, and simplifying requirements such as climate change assessments could be dangerous. Despite promises made in the White Paper, it was hard to see affordable housing commitments chiming with this. Instead, it would likely incentivise off-site affordable housing delivery. Further to this, the government had outlined its intention to impose time constraints and financial penalties on councils, but offered no such measures to prevent developers land-banking.

She emphasised that zonal planning would effectively deregulate the planning system, unless predefined rules specifically prohibited the development. The proposals in the White Paper were too simplistic, and did not demonstrate the solid evidence and community engagement necessary to justify such changes. The significantly accelerated timeframes would also likely damage plans for affordable housing delivery and have a negative impact on local communities. She added that the overall lack of detail did not allow thorough understanding of the government's planned reforms and their consequences, leaving significant questions to be answered.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles asked about the implications for the Joint Core Strategy, whether local green spaces were safeguarded under the proposals, and why the government did not use its power to stop developers land-banking. The Cabinet Member Economy and Development responded that there was not enough detail in the government's plans to reassure them that green spaces and the social good they bring would be adequately protected. The Planning Officer (David Oakhill) updated members on the developing situation regarding a planning application on a piece of local green space.

The Cabinet Member Housing praised planning officers for their concise and analytical summary of a lengthy White Paper. He stressed that the consequences for affordable housing were key, and that he was disappointed at

the government's failure to prioritise the ongoing housing and homelessness crises. None of the proposed changes would deal with either problem, and seemed to focus instead on facilitating private sector development at the expense of affordable housing. He endorsed the CBC response, but suggested that he would have been harsher.

The Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety added that the government's proposals seemed to imply that the UK's lack of housing was due to local authorities' unwillingness to make land supply available. He stressed that it was disingenuous to blame councils, since there needed to be an end user in order for houses to be built. He described the White Paper's proposals as politically driven, and suggested they would do nothing to address the very real problems within the UK planning system.

The Cabinet Member Climate and Communities criticised the current planning system's failure to properly deliver affordable housing, but suggested that nothing in the government's proposals would solve this. Instead, it would adversely affect local communities, fail to tackle climate change and reduce the number of affordable houses. Any changes to the planning process must be transparent and democratic, and should safeguard the housing and employment opportunities that the Joint Core Strategy sought to deliver. The Leader of the Council agreed that giving greater power to the private sector, which had an obvious interest in limiting the amount of housing available, would not solve the housing crisis.

The vote was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **This Cabinet Paper form the basis of the Council's response to 'Planning for the Future';**
2. **Responsibility for preparing and submitting the Council's response to 'Planning for the Future', including the detailed/technical questions included in the consultation be delegated to the Head of Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Development.**

8. DISCRETIONARY TEST AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME

The Cabinet Member Finance presented the report, praising the work of the finance team in turning the report around in less than a week. It sought to support those who were required to self-isolate due to the Covid-19 crisis, and was formally launched on the day of the meeting (Tuesday 13th October). She noted that, in her view, the amount of funding received from central government was relatively small, but hoped that it would make a significant difference to those in the borough facing financial difficulty due to the requirement to self-isolate.

The Leader of the Council praised the finance team and Cabinet Member for reacting to a fast-moving situation and getting the money out to those who needed it.

The vote was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme in Appendix 2 which will be in place until 31 January 2021 be approved, subject to funding being available;**
2. **Authority be delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to take decisions relating to applications made under the Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme;**
3. **The Head of Revenues and Benefits be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance, to make changes to the Discretionary Scheme in line with any changes made by Government, or, as required to ensure the successful operation of the scheme;**
4. **The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme in Appendix 3 be noted, and authority be delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to take decisions relating to applications;**
5. **The Cabinet Member Finance be authorised to extend the Discretionary Scheme beyond 31 January 2021 in line with Government direction and subject to funding being available.**

9. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles updated members on the situation with Cheltenham Hospital. She reported that a resolution would be considered at the next full Council meeting on the public's response to whether the A&E would be fit for the future. She stressed that a great deal of work was needed, with critical incidents declared at the hospital, and asked colleagues to keep her updated on constituents' responses. She added that local parish councils were being consulted as part of this, and that she hoped positive work could be done before the next Council meeting. She also congratulated several cultural partners for securing funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment praised the council's positive links with Ubico, stressing the importance of partnership working and investment in the in-house team. He reported that the Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership had met for the first time recently, particularly to discuss communication with residents, and added that it was important to build on this relationship in the future.

The Cabinet Member Housing reported that he had received a letter from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government promising

additional funding for alleviating rough sleeping. He would update members at the next meeting with more information when it was received.

The Cabinet Member Climate and Communities reported that the trial of e-scooters was underway, and he was keen to gather public feedback on how it was going. He reminded participants in the trial that the scooters were not to be used on the pavement.

The Leader of the Council reported that Covid-19 cases were on the rise across Gloucestershire, mostly in urban areas. Although Cheltenham remained at about half the national average overall, it was important to not be complacent. He added that the council had received £49,000 as part of the government's street marshals fund, although this was not required to necessarily be spent on Covid marshals, and could be used however the council felt was most effective at reducing disease transmission.

Chairman