

Cabinet

**Tuesday, 21st December, 2021
6.00 - 7.05 pm**

Attendees

Councillors: Rowena Hay (Leader of the Council), Peter Jeffries (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Finance & Assets), Victoria Atherstone (Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing & Business), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Safety & Communities), Mike Collins (Cabinet Member Housing), Iain Dobie (Cabinet Member Waste & Recycling & Street Services), Martin Horwood (Cabinet Member Customer & Regulatory Services), Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Cyber & Strategic Transport) and Max Wilkinson (Cabinet Member Climate Emergency)

Also in attendance: Paul Jones, Harry Mayo and Bev Thomas

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the 30th November meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

5. FEES AND CHARGES - ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services introduced the report, noting that since 2011, the charge for collecting garden waste had increased on only four occasions. It was proposed that from February 2022, the Authority's garden waste collection charge would be increased from £45/year to £47/year per bin, including an inflationary increase of 4.2% rounded up to £2 to reflect the increased cost of running the service such as the cost of fuel, consumables and staffing. There would be no change to the number of collections per household per year.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. An increase in the garden waste collection charge from £45/year to £47/year per bin, in line with the current rate of inflation at 4.2%, be approved;
2. The prompt payment discount for households renewing their subscription ahead of their annual renewal date and the spring offer discount be discontinued with effect from 1 February 2022;
3. Authority be delegated to the Managing Director Place and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, to implement the decision.

6. CLARENCE FOUNTAIN

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency presented the report, noting that residents and visitors had really enjoyed using the Clarence Fountain as a community hub, as well as a spot to enjoy food and drinks and a break while in the town centre. The temporary seating had been well-received but the plastic grass was not, so they were retaining the former and replacing the latter and creating a new pocket park where people could do all the things they were doing before and more. There would be accessible seating for those using wheelchairs, and it would be a green area with trees and shrubs planted to cool the area in the summer and boost biodiversity. They were working towards a spring 2022 launch, meaning it should be ready just as the weather improves.

He cited this as an important piece of the puzzle in the wider context of the work the council was doing in the town centre, and in tackling climate change.

The Cabinet Member Cyber and Strategic Transport noted that the existing facilities had been implemented while he was the responsible Cabinet Member, and that this project would take advantage of the best elements of that. The temporary facilities were originally only supposed to last 9 months but this was extended due to the pandemic. At the time, they did not fully anticipate how well used the area would be, and it had become a real focal point of the town centre. The new design would be more in keeping with the area.

The Leader praised the wheelchair accessibility as a key part of making it a genuinely inclusive space for people with disabilities, as well as people with pushchairs.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The final concept design for Clarence Fountain as described in the report and included in Appendix 2 be approved;
2. CBC contract rules be waived as described in the report, and the appointment of Cotswolds Estate & Gardens Ltd be approved to construct the approved design;
3. Responsibility for agreeing a construction contract with Cotswold Estate & Gardens Ltd be delegated to the Head of Property, Finance and Assets in consultation with the Townscape Manager, Project Manager and the Borough Solicitor;

4. The allocation of up to £95k to deliver the scheme be approved.

7. GAMBLING ACT 2005 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services introduced the report, noting that it was an update of the previous statement with all the changes highlighted. Cheltenham had a long-running association with gambling and as ever, it was important to enjoy gambling responsibly and be alert to its risks. The key principles were to ensure that it was safe, fair and open, and not connected to crime or disorder, and to protect children from its possible harms. Gambling enforcement mostly related to permits and licenses, and although the council was by no means a complete regulator, there was plenty it could do to regulate the practice and keep people safe. He thanked licensing officers, particularly Louis Krog, for their work on this.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities queried whether the Cheltenham Lottery would be affected by any of the changes. The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services confirmed that it would not.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The proposed changes to the Statement of Principles, highlighted in Appendix 2, be noted;
2. The consultation feedback be noted;
3. The adoption of the Statement of Principles be recommended to full Council on 21st February 2022.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT (IFS) REQUIREMENTS

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services introduced the report, explaining that the funding statement detailed the funds they had raised and spent from two sources: traditional developer contributions and the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). It also included an infrastructure list, which was an informative rather than binding list of potential future projects. The IFS and infrastructure list were part of a route to greater transparency and openness.

He acknowledged that the government's proscribed format was indigestible and very hard to follow, and suggested that in the future he and officers would work on building infographics that displayed the data in a way that would make it easier to understand what had been raised and where it would go. He discussed the different areas that were guaranteed a certain proportion of funding, including some parish councils. It was important to be transparent and accountable, and to align with climate change priorities like modal shift.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities suggested that it should be highlighted that parish councils with a Neighbourhood Plan received a greater proportion of funding than those without one – with the difference being 25% to 15%. The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services agreed, and

noted that the funds mitigated the impact of developments and helped parish councils to share in their benefits.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities suggested that due to the size of the North West Cheltenham development, it would be worth the Cabinet Member and officers meeting with the parish council to ensure they were fully aware of its implications. The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services agreed with this.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities added that infrastructure took many forms, including schools and medical centres, and that a more diverse infrastructure list was needed to reflect these needs. The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency echoed this, noting that parts 3.2 and 3.4 of the report made clear that the list was under review. He was pleased by the focus on sustainable transport, and hoped that the review would be meaningful and look to reflect the values they had set out as an authority, for example through cycle lanes and pedestrian infrastructure. The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services agreed with these points.

The Cabinet Member Housing supported the report and welcomed the focus on openness and transparency. It was important that residents could understand its implications and what the future held for their area.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services for his contributions and members for a constructive debate. There was a great deal of crossover between the CIL and the Joint Core Strategy, and she would continue to work closely with him on it.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) relating to the financial year ending 31st March 2021 be approved for publication;
2. It be noted that the Annual CIL Rate Summary Statement will be published alongside it by the 31st December 2021.

9. INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR GENERAL FUND

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report, noting that the council and many other authorities had faced unprecedented financial challenges over the last 18 months in providing the resources and support to manage the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was in addition to a decade of austerity resulting in year-on-year cuts to the Council's funding. With the emergence of the Omicron variant, the uncertainty continued to impact customer behaviour, with a further financial impact on commercial income and on the town's economy. With that in mind, it was critical that they set a budget that was balanced and targeted to ensure the council could continue to lead the recovery from Covid-19.

The budget proposals aimed to utilise assets, skills and infrastructure to enable inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth across the borough. It provided an opportunity to reset the baseline position against their corporate priorities and prepare a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2022/23

and beyond, ensuring financial sustainability whilst continuing to support economic recovery and growth for the town and the council's climate change ambitions. Working with stakeholders would allow the council to fine-tune services based on actual needs and address those which were under-met.

The responsible allocation of finite resources was essential, and they had identified over £1.5m of efficiencies to date through collaboration and additional revenue generation. The budget proposed a modest increase of 2.28% in council tax, which for a Band D property equated to less than 10p a week extra.

He outlined the context behind this increase and acknowledged that the recovery from the pandemic was not yet complete. The recovery strategy was focused on revitalising and reshaping the economy and ensuring that future growth benefitted all communities.

The formal budget consultation on the budget proposals would run until 26th January 2022, and he hoped that the widest possible audience could have a chance to make their voices heard. With this in mind, he had requested a number of formal meetings with interested parties including businesses, the voluntary sector, parish councils and trade unions.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency recognised the hard work and professionalism of the finance team in producing the proposals, considering the timing of the local government settlement and the wider situation at the moment. The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets echoed this and thanked Paul Jones, Gemma Bell and the rest of the finance team for ploughing on in turbulent times for the benefit of the town.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The interim budget proposals be approved for consultation, including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council. The proposed Council tax for 2022/23 represents an increase of 2.28% or £5.00 a year for a Band D property. Note the detailed schedule of target savings at Appendix 3;
2. The proposed capital programme at Appendix 5, as outlined in Section 8, be approved;
3. Authority be delegated to the Executive Director Finance and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for public consultation which will include any changes arising from the provisional settlement;

4. Consultation responses be sought by 26 January 2022.

10. INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR HRA

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report, noting that the focus of the HRA proposals was to support the economic recovery of Cheltenham and improve the quality of life for their customers and communities. As Cheltenham recovered, they wanted to ensure that the recovery was shared as widely as possible. This could be achieved by continuing the council's significant investment in improving existing homes and supplying much-needed new homes. Low carbon, energy efficient, high-quality homes would be warmer and cost less to run, and improve the health and wellbeing of communities. In addition to this, they would continue to provide high quality landlord and community services whilst ensuring operating costs delivered value for money.

The interim budget proposals for 2022/23, including the focus on sustainable, green investment, would ensure that the council would continue enabling tenants and communities to thrive, improving outcomes for young people, reducing inequality and supporting the economic recovery of Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency praised the focus on affordable housing. The target of 1,000 affordable homes target by 2030 would make an enormous difference to 1,000 families. The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities agreed, emphasising the need to support vulnerable people. The Cabinet Member Cyber and Strategic Transport also echoed this, noting that no other council in the country had increased its affordable housing targets by so much. Despite the tough financial situation, they were continuing to make positive decisions to secure the future of the town and support residents.

The Cabinet Member Housing added that the housing team was constantly in consultation with housing providers to deliver the best possible results. It was important to use government funding effectively and keep building for the future while delivering the best possible services.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets thanked colleagues for their support and for highlighting a number of key priorities. The council needed to be forward-thinking and inclusive. He thanked CBH and the finance team for their help, both on this report and across the whole pandemic.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The revised HRA forecast for 2021/22 be noted;
2. The interim HRA budget proposals for 2022/23 (shown at Appendix 2) be approved for consultation, including a proposed rent increase of 4.1% and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within the report;
3. The proposed HRA capital programme for 2022/23, as shown at Appendix 3 and Appendix 4, be approved;
4. Authority be delegated to the Executive Director Finance and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for consultation;

5. Consultation responses be sought by 26th January 2022.

11. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Cyber and Strategic Transport reported that the county council had opened up its online consultation on potential improvements to Junction 10 and the A4109 on Tewkesbury Road, which would run until 15th February. The public were asked to comment on potential plans for four-way junction and the widening of Tewkesbury Road to become a dual carriageway, along with further possible improvements.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities reported that the No Child Left Behind awards ceremony for those who went above and beyond was due to take place on 13th January, but had unfortunately been postponed due to the Covid situation. She hoped that it would take place in March, and added that she was very proud of how the town had come together to support children in the area during such a difficult time.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency reported that a consortium of seven authorities including CBC, led by Stroud, had been successful in its bid for funding as part of the government's Sustainable Warmth competition. This aimed to help local authorities install energy saving upgrades and low carbon heating in low-income households. He was excited to see how many homes this would benefit and hoped it could help alleviate fuel poverty. The Cabinet Member Housing echoed this.

The Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services reported that St George's Road car park was open again after refurbishments, and was already being well used.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets added that he had an urgent matter to report, following on from the Discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme distributed to businesses during the pandemic. To date, £4m had been allocated across five rounds between November 2020 and July 2021, with £346,000 purposely held back in case of difficulties this winter. A new round of the scheme was due to be made available to businesses after Christmas, but due to the escalating situation with the Omicron variant, it would go live on 22nd December. This would enable businesses that were seeing cancellations and reduced footfall in the hospitality sector as a result of the rise in cases to apply ahead of Christmas. Grants would be available to local pubs, bars and restaurants and travel businesses that had lost trade, in advance of and in addition to the government announcements of one-off grants of up to £6,000. The government had also announced that further Additional Restrictions Grant funding would be made available for discretionary schemes. As soon as we had more details of this, the Business Grants Team would work at speed to make the grants available and update the discretionary scheme so that more businesses received support. A full media release would be published on the 22nd December with a link to this new round of discretionary grant funding.

The Leader praised council staff for their work and emphasised her pride at being part of this administration. She thanked officers and members, and wished everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

There were no decisions to report from Cabinet Members.

Chairman