

Council

Monday, 21st February, 2022
2.30 - 6.00 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Harvey (Chair), Victoria Atherstone, Matt Babbage, Dilys Barrell, Ian Bassett-Smith, Nigel Britter, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Tim Harman, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Chris Mason, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Diggory Seacome, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

Minutes

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Baker, Barnes, Boyes, Brownsteen, Fisher, Flynn, Hegenbarth, Holliday, Maughfling, McKinlay, Savage, Stafford and Oliver.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Agenda item 11: Councillor Barrell declared a non-pecuniary interest as her son works for CBH. Councillors Pinegar and Mason also declared a non-pecuniary interest, as non-executive directors of CBH, and Councillor Clucas, as Chair of Big Local, which works with CBC on a number of capital schemes.

Agenda item 12: Councillors Clark and Lewis declared a non-pecuniary interest, as non-executive directors of the Cheltenham Trust.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2021 were signed as a true record, without any amendments.

4. **COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR**

The Mayor informed Members that he had written to Her Majesty the Queen at the beginning of the year, wishing her well for her Platinum Jubilee year, and trusted that Members would join him in sending best wishes to her for a speedy recovery from Covid.

He also confirmed that he had fulfilled one of his ambitions as Mayor to replace the mayoral car, previously diesel, with an electric vehicle.

5. **COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Leader thanked all staff for their preparations and involvement in the local resilience forum, and the emergency planning team in covering the recent Storm Eunice.

She also informed Members that Councillor Maughfling had stood down as Chair of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee, due to pressures of a new job. She thanked him for his time and tenure, and advised that his replacement would be Councillor McCloskey.

6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

Mr Newman presented a petition of 801 signatures (plus a further 25 on line), requesting improved lighting throughout Sandford Park on both sides of College Road and from Bath Road to Keynsham Road. He said that two studies show that increased lighting reduces criminality, and local people want to feel safer in and around the park after dark.

The Mayor received the petition, and advised that this would be shared with the most appropriate cabinet member and, in view of the number of signatures, would be debated by Council as soon as possible. He said that receipt of the petition would be acknowledged within ten days.

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Peter Frings to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rowena Hay
	<p>In the 2020-2021 CBC Carbon Emissions Report, only the carbon impact of the airport's <u>ground operations</u> is published. The Climate Change Committee's report 'Local Authorities and the 6th Carbon Budget' says: "<i>Local authorities can separate airport and aviation emissions, but should not ignore them in climate conversations.</i>" Although local authorities are not required to include aviation emissions in their local footprint, it is important that local people know what contribution aviation emissions from Gloucestershire Airport are making to the climate crisis – because local people – through the Cheltenham and Gloucester councils – own the airport.</p> <p><i>Will the borough council commit to reporting on aviation emissions and publish annual figures starting from 2019 (the year the council declared a climate emergency)?</i></p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you to Mr Frings for his question. He is right to raise this issue. While news reports tell us that technology in the aviation industry is improving and moves are being made towards low carbon flight, there remains a clear and difficult-to-resolve conflict between aviation operations and our environmental goals. We understand the carbon impact of aviation emissions is often much greater than the impact of emissions from ground operations. We continue to improve the way we calculate our carbon footprint as an authority and strive to lead the way in the accuracy, transparency and thoroughness of our reporting.</p> <p>However, whilst Gloucestershire Airport is owned jointly by Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City Councils, it is operated by Gloucestershire Airport Ltd (GAL) under a long leasehold interest. As such, we currently include 50% of the airport's Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions in CBC's carbon emissions reports and will continue to do so (these are covered</p>

	<p>under our Scope 3 emissions). This follows current Green House Gas (GHG) reporting guidelines. We will encourage GAL to publish its full carbon footprint, including aviation emissions, over which CBC currently has no direct control.</p>
2.	<p>Question from David Newman to the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor Max Wilkinson</p> <p>If the House of Commons Select Committee on Standards can enjoy the democracy of membership consisting of 7 MPs and 5 Lay members with full voting rights, why can the Cheltenham Borough Council Standards Committee's 2 Independent members who sit with 7 Councillor members not have voting rights too, which at present they are denied?</p> <p>If it is considered right by Parliament that Lay members have full voting rights surely it is only right that the same rule be enjoyed in Local Government?</p> <p>Please could this matter be raised with the full Council. I would hope it would be considered an essential need to change the present rule in the interests of fairness, democracy and accountability.</p>
	<p>Response from Chair of Standards Committee</p> <p>Thank you to Mr Newman for asking this important question. Standards of political conduct are a talking point at national level, after recent news events. It is right that we always check our processes and procedures to ensure we are following best practice.</p> <p>Our Standards Committee membership is informed by best practice and legislation. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 at s. 13 makes the initial point that co-opted members have no voting rights and the Localism Act states that Independent Persons have an advisory role when operating within a Standards Committee. Independent members make their views known both through the formal report before the Committee and during the proceedings, by having the option to address the Committee.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, I will refer this matter to the next Standards Committee meeting for discussion.</p>
3.	<p>Question from Tess Beck to the Cabinet Member Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas</p> <p>Does the council carry out any background checks (e.g. DBS, police check) on people who put themselves up as candidates in local elections - either at the nomination stage or once a candidate is elected/ takes up office?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The Council does not carry out background checks on candidates standing in local elections. The nomination paper includes the candidate's consent to nomination in which the candidate must declare that they meet at least one of the qualifications listed in the consent form. This form also includes the disqualifications for election and holding office as a member of the local</p>

	<p>authority. The candidate must sign the consent confirming that they qualify to stand and that they are not disqualified, which must be witnessed. Guidance about standing as a candidate can be found at: https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/Part%201%20Can%20you%20stand%20for%20election%20LGE.pdf</p> <p>Upon election, no checks are undertaken by the Council.</p>
	Supplementary question
	<p>Thank you for your response and your helpful link to the Electoral Commission. From the link, it appears that there are fewer background checks on someone standing for - or even taking up - public office than there are for someone wanting to become a taxi driver, for example. The electoral commission rules are determined at national level. Does the local authority have the power to impose its own restrictions, e.g. to prevent someone who is subject to an injunction or ASBO, or with a history of offending from taking up public office?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for your question, you are quite right that background checks are a national issue. If somebody were to apply for a licence, there would be some checks in relation to this to ensure the safety of those using the service they provided. However, the provisions that disqualify persons from holding office are set down in legislation at national level, and local authorities cannot have their alternative provisions at a local level.</p>

8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	For each year 2019, 2020 and 2021. Could the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency please confirm how many trees the Borough Council has planted either on its own or in partnership?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Year 19-20 2496 trees Year 20-21 1655 trees Year 21-22 1949 trees</p> <p>This reflects the number of trees in each planting season between October and February.</p>
2.	Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	On a number of occasions the Council has confirmed its desire to support local industry. Duku, a Lansdown based product design agency, is involved in several EV charging projects, including trials with Oxford, Plymouth and Dundee Councils. I believe the company has tried to contact the Borough Council but as yet have not received a reply. Would the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency agree to talk to Duku?

	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you to Councillor Mason for his question. He's right to raise this topic.</p> <p>In line with the recent announcement by the Borough Council, we are working towards setting up a process to identify a private sector provider to help install charging points in Borough Council car parks. The appointment of a private sector partner would need to follow the usual rules of the public sector. Notwithstanding this, and without prejudice to any other process, I would welcome an invitation from Duku to find out more about their local operations. For on-street EV charging matters, we would encourage all interested parties to contact the County Council as Highways Authority.</p>
	Supplementary question
	If the director of the company contacts you, would you be willing to speak with him?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Yes, of course. I would also advise him that there may be some crossover with the county council too in terms of on-street charging points.
3.	Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	Gloucester City Council has sustained a serious cyber-attack, and there is some suspicion that the origin may be from an overseas source. Can the Cabinet Member outline the steps that are being taken to protect Cheltenham Borough Council from a similar attack and thereby protect our services?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	The Council takes the risks around cyber-attacks seriously. In conjunction with the Council's Chief Technology Officer, we regularly review the monitoring and prevention measures we have in place. I understand all group leaders have received a confidential cyber security briefing from the Council's CTO, which included preventive and security measures, resilience and business continuity. Due to the sensitive nature of the work involved, it would not be appropriate to put that information in the public domain. The Council is also in the process of reviewing all of its business continuity arrangements, which Audit Committee have been briefed on. If group leaders would like a follow up meeting with the Council's CTO that can be arranged.
	Supplementary question
	Would the Cabinet Member agree that considering the current international situation, it is especially important to be vigilant about potential cyber-attacks? In addition to this, could Group Leaders be updated again as it has been some time since their last briefing?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Absolutely – resilience and diligence at this council is high, but if the

	<p>current situation deteriorates then a timely update will be offered.</p> <p>The Mayor added that Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee always asked questions of the Publica team and had met with the Head of IT.</p>
4.	Question from Councillor Paul McCloskey to the Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Mike Collins
	<p>THE DIGITAL DIVIDE</p> <p>I was shocked during a visit to Coopers Court CBH Residential Home in Charlton Kings to discover that there was no Wi-Fi in the lounge.</p> <p>Discussion had turned to loneliness and how residents had managed to keep in contact with family and friends during lockdown. Very few had smartphones or tablets and those that did found the cost of data very expensive.</p> <p>Can I please ask the Cabinet Member:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How many CBH multi-occupancy buildings in Cheltenham have free Wi-Fi? 2) What plans there are for installing FREE Wi-Fi in Coopers Court and other similar homes? 3) Given the '<i>No Child Left Behind</i>' and '<i>Levelling Up</i>' Agenda, what plans are there to ensure that ALL CBH tenants have access to fast, reliable and affordable Wi-Fi, so that Digital Exclusion can become history?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p><i>How many CBH multi-occupancy buildings in Cheltenham have free Wi-Fi?</i></p> <p>CBH's aspiration is to reduce digital exclusion through CBH customers being able to access digital services through provision of digital connectivity where feasible and support and training for customers. At present there are no CBH multi occupancy buildings in Cheltenham that have free WiFi.</p> <p><i>What plans there are for installing FREE Wi-Fi in Coopers Court and other similar homes?</i></p> <p>A project is currently underway following a successful joint bid by CBC and CBH to the Better Care Fund to enhance communal spaces at two sheltered schemes, Coopers Court and Popes Close. This project will convert the current spaces into more dynamic and interactive places and support the aim of increasing independent living by improving health and wellbeing and reducing isolation of older people living at the schemes and the wider community. It is expected that the new hubs will offer a wide range of activities and events with IT equipment with free on-line access in the lounge included as part of the project. Learning from this pilot will support decisions around the installation of wifi across further sheltered</p>

	<p>schemes and the wider housing stock, as there are capital, revenue, procurement and ongoing management implications.</p> <p>CBH offers customers access to digital services through the CBH digi den where equipment, training and support are provided to use the equipment and access online services, in addition to providing training on the CBH Portal to increase the confidence in using and transition to digital services.</p> <p><i>Given the 'No Child Left Behind' and 'Levelling Up' Agenda, what plans are there to ensure that ALL CBH tenants have access to fast, reliable and affordable Wi-Fi, so that Digital Exclusion can become history?</i></p> <p>Any funding opportunities available to reduce digital exclusion through provision of equipment and/or training and support will be actively followed up. Data indicates that 95% of CBH general needs homes have access to digital services, with occupants accessing digital services and using digital services for varying technical purposes. The risks of digital exclusion were heightened during lockdown when children were unable to attend school. Of the families identified as being at risk of digital exclusion in CBH homes only three were found to not have access to a digital service and device and these were supported as needed. Families were also supported during the pandemic through the CBC led Laptops for Learning initiative.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question</p>
	<p>This is a very encouraging response, which shows the breadth of things happening in this very important area. Broadband poverty affects around 20% of families in the UK, who have to choose between access to a phone or food.</p> <p>Can I also ask more specifically about the progress of the refugees housed in Cheltenham, for whom we sought IT equipment?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>Thank you for raising the serious issue of broadband poverty. It is hugely important to bridge the digital divide for the most vulnerable people in our communities, and we will work with partners and providers of social housing to identify funding and address this as effectively as possible.</p> <p>On the question of refugees, we will continue to do what we can to support the town's new Syrian and Afghan residents. Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) is doing fantastic work on this, which we supported with a further grant last week. CBC and CBH are also offering IT help to new residents, using our digital hubs and the Digi-Den at Hester's Way.</p>
5.	<p>Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business Councillor Victoria Atherstone</p>
	<p>Can the Cabinet member give us an update of the Wilson refurbishment, along with a potential opening date?</p>

	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for your question Cllr Seacome, as you know the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum is managed by the Cheltenham Trust and was closed in March 2020 by the Covid19 pandemic. The council has worked with the Trust to bring forward plans for a major refurbishment to create a new community arts gallery, vibrant arts café and ancillary spaces, and artists' studios.</p> <p>The scheme has been made possible by a significant bequest from the Sir Charles Irving Trust and matched funding from Cheltenham Borough Council.</p> <p>I am pleased that the new Wilson will create a dynamic cultural hub for the whole community and visitors to Cheltenham. It will offer café culture complemented by a comprehensive cultural programme featuring talks, workshops, creative events, local and national exhibitions and shows.</p> <p>The plan is for the Wilson to reopen in conjunction with The Minster Exchange in summer 2022.</p> <p>The investment will enable the blend of culture and commercial to assist the future financial sustainability and credibility of the venue as a major visitor destination. It has been vital that to deliver this vision the refurbishment focused on delivering the right design and functionality and flexible use of all spaces. As is the case with almost all major investment projects, the process has been iterative to ensure that stakeholders and users have had the opportunity to influence the designs and functionality.</p> <p>Delivering a capital investment project during the pandemic has added challenges and has inevitably affected timescales for resource, supplies and works.</p> <p>Pre-works have commenced and as The Wilson is a Grade II listed building it requires planning consent. The planning application is in process and will hopefully be considered at the next planning committee on March 24th.</p> <p>This is a significant project and, combined with the new Minster Exchange and regeneration of the Minster grounds, will create a new and exciting cultural destination zone for the town embracing and promoting culture, arts and history for all to enjoy and participate in.</p>
6.	Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	What are the plans for finding a suitable venue for the Tourist Information Centre, and re-instating it?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Thank you for your question Councillor Seacome. The specification and requirements of the Tourist Information service in Cheltenham has and continues to be reviewed as part of the management agreement between the Council and The Cheltenham Trust.

	<p>Due to the continued closure and remodelling of the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum and the reopening of our high street since the pandemic, Marketing Cheltenham has been working on a new pilot that seeks to test a new approach to the provision of visitor and community information in Cheltenham. This pilot is being funded through the Council's Welcome Back funding. The new facility in the town centre is scheduled to launch early March ahead of some of the town's major events getting underway. The results of this pilot will then inform our plans going forward for visitor information services.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question</p>
	<p>Can you be specific about the ways you are approaching this? For example, will it be a physical office or an online information service?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>As it stands, the pilot will be a pod which can either be manned or unmanned, so that information is available at all times. The key thing for the pilot to test is how people feel about how they're getting the information, and to figure out which approach is preferable as a result.</p>
7.	<p>Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business Councillor Victoria Atherstone</p>
	<p>Can the Cabinet Member provide us with un-massaged figures for the ice rink in Imperial Square this winter. <u>Details should include, please:-</u> Initial Set up/derigging Costs Extra costs in sorting out the generators' hum to the satisfaction (almost) of the residents. Paid attendances, week by week. Comments/figures on the amount of carbon created by the generators would also be appreciated.</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>Thank you again for your question Councillor Seacome.</p> <p>A full report on the Christmas ice rink is to be tabled at the Cabinet meeting on 1st March, which includes a full evaluation of the ice rink's performance and impact.</p> <p>I can confirm however that total costs for the build, operation and de-ripping of the ice rink amounted to £378,822, of which £10,005 was attributable to the scoping and installation of noise mitigation measures.</p> <p>The ice rink welcomed a total of 43,563 skaters over its 45 days of operation, generating net revenues of £360,900. When combined with additional advertising and sponsorship, total net revenue came to £384,200, resulting in a modest surplus of £5,377.</p> <p>The use of the generator to provide sufficient power to maintain the ice rink was, as we know, unavoidable due to the insufficient supply of mains power into Imperial Gardens. Whilst the levels of power and usage of the generator varied daily due to the fluctuating temperatures and conditions</p>

	<p>of the ice, inevitably, there would have been a greater level of carbon emissions as a result of its use.</p> <p>We do not yet have the information required on the environmental impact of the generators over that 45 day period. The council will however be calculating the environmental impact from the use of generators across all event activities in our town centre parks as part of our interim events strategy and business case for the provision of greener power. This information will be shared in due course.</p> <p>In 2019 Cheltenham Borough Council pledged to become net zero by 2030 and acknowledges generators are not suitable for powering events in our parks. This is why the aforementioned Cabinet report also puts forward a recommendation for the installation of sufficient mains power supply.</p>
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9. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23 - 2026/27

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report, noting that the net value of CBC’s assets had risen by around £490m since the current asset management strategy was approved in 2015. Their assets ranged from allotments to modern office accommodation, and included 10% of homes in the town. It was clear that a lot had changed since 2015, and a new framework was needed in order to maximise the benefits the assets could provide.

He explained that the new strategy provided a way to assess how each asset was contributing to the council’s key priorities, and to help them make informed, transparent and safe decisions. Detailed asset plans would sit underneath the strategy, enabling the council to monitor the performance of its assets on an ongoing basis. These plans would be overseen by the Asset Management Working Group and a new dedicated officer group.

The strategy had been presented for consultation and feedback at the Asset Management Working Group, the Overview and Scrutiny committee, and both informally and formally with Cabinet colleagues. He stressed that the future in terms of property was exciting, and that he was looking forward to seeing the outcomes of doing things differently, enabling more value and enhancing assets for the benefit of residents, communities, and visitors to the town.

Members made the following comments:

- a separate category for potential assets that needed development or regeneration would be helpful;
- the growth in CBC’s asset portfolio over six years was a real sign of progress in the town, and its residential and social housing portfolio was promising too.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets noted that the investment strategy took the separate category into account. He thanked Members for their comments, and officers and the Asset Management Working Group for their role in putting together the strategy.

10. FUTURE PROVISION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT FROM 2023/24

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report, noting that Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) were responsible for the national scheme to appoint auditors and set fees for local government and police bodies. PSAA oversaw all issues around compliance and the independence of the audit firm for local authorities that opted into the scheme. He emphasised that it would deliver better value for money for the council than going out to secure its own auditor.

The first national scheme covered the audit of statement of accounts from 2018/19 to 2021/22, while the second national scheme would run from 1st April 2023. The Audit, Compliance and Governance had discussed this when it met in January and had been happy to approve it, but the final decision on whether to opt in again was for Council.

One Member added that as a member of the Audit, Compliance and Governance committee, they had shared the opinion of officers that the collective scheme offered value for money. The Mayor agreed with this as a previous Chair of the committee.

11. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - REVISED FORECAST 2021/22 AND BUDGET PROPOSALS 2022/23

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets presented his report, telling Members that the focus of the HRA budget proposals was to support Cheltenham's economic recovery and improve the quality of life for tenants and communities. He said the pandemic continued to have a huge impact and, together with the looming cost of living crisis, represented a massive challenge for our customers and neighbourhoods. The council wanted to do all it could to ensure that Cheltenham's recovery was shared as widely as possible.

Specific measures included:

- significant investment in homes and services - £34m in the next three years to improve existing homes, and £67m for new homes;
- the aspiration to make Cheltenham a net zero carbon council and borough by 2030, by improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing homes, and ensuring a significant proportion of new homes will be net zero carbon, starting with the development at 320 Swindon Road;
- high-quality landlord and community services, in collaboration with CBH and other partners, controlling operating costs and delivering value for money;
- advice on benefits and money issues, support in finding work and training, hubs for and delivery of community activities, digital inclusion opportunities, and close collaboration with schools to help students remain in mainstream education;
- focus on sustainable, green investment.

He told Members that the proposed HRA budget would support tenants, help communities to thrive, improve outcomes for young people, reduce inequality and support the economic recovery of Cheltenham through this challenging period. He thanked officers and CBH for all their help in bringing the report together.

All Members echoed thanks to officers, to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets for a very clear report, and in particular to CBH, who enjoy a well-deserved and positive reputation for their work, quality of their care, and positive contribution across the town. They also commented that:

- the services and support available to the most vulnerable members of the community were invaluable, housing being the biggest and most important council service, a decent home being the foundation for everything else;
- the proposed budget reinforced continual progress and product improvement, thus avoiding problems further down the line;
- CBH doesn't just provide housing, but also helps and supports young people across the borough. The close bond between CBC and CBH was recognised and appreciated, and would hopefully continue to grow;
- CBH also worked with Big Local to regenerate parts of the town, and thanks go to officers in the front line of the community investment team for their work. Some areas of St Mark's ward need additional support and CBH is a key and critical partner for CBC in this;
- CBH's downsizing programme - encouraging people to vacate much-needed 3-4-bedroomed houses and purchasing homes on the open market – deserved recognition, and was important in terms in integrating CBH properties in communities and offering more secure tenancies on decent homes;
- CBH maintains a good level of apprentices, which is to be welcomed.

The Cabinet Member Assets and Finance was pleased that CBH's reputation precedes itself, agreeing that it does a fantastic job. He thanked all colleagues, and hoped that CBH's finance director, who was present at the meeting, would feed back the positive comments and compliments from Members.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT:

- 1. The revised HRA forecast for 2021/22 be noted;**
- 2. The HRA budget proposals for 2022/23 (shown at Appendix 2) be approved, including a proposed rent increase of 4.1% and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within the report;**
- 3. The HRA capital programme for 2022/223, as shown at Appendix 3 and 4, be approved.**

FOR: (27): Atherstone, Babbage, Barrell, Bassett-Smith, Britter, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Harman, Harvey, Hay, Horwood, Jeffries, Lewis, Mason, McCloskey, Nelson, Payne, Pinegar, Sankey, Seacome, Stafford, Wheeler, Wilkinson, Williams and Willingham.

AGAINST (0)

ABSTENTIONS (0)

12. FINAL GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023

The Mayor reminded Members that usual standing orders would be relaxed for this item, and they could speak for more than five minutes should they wish. He asked, however, that they be as brief as possible.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the budget paper, reminding Members of the unprecedented financial challenges faced by all councils over the last 18 months, in addition to the year-on-year cuts to the council's funding as a result of a decade of austerity. There was still significant uncertainty about the long-term impact of the pandemic on growth, investment and inflation, which currently stood at 5.5%, the highest level for 40 years, and was expected to peak at 7% in April.

He said that with the emergence of the Omicron variant, uncertainty continued to impact customer behaviour, which may in turn have a further financial impact on the council's commercial income and town's economy. The budget therefore needed to be balanced and targeted to ensure adequate revenue resources to continue recovery from Covid-19. The previous budget included a number of growth items in direct response to the Covid-19, providing revenue funding for climate change, economic recovery, and the introduction of an apprenticeship programme. In addition, in November 2020, the council committed £1.5m additional resources to the Golden Valley development.

He reminded Members that the key priorities, set out in the 2019 Corporate Plan, have not changed, and the council remained committed to:

- delivering its ambition to be cyber capital of the UK; inclusion of the Golden Valley development and the council in the government's recent national cyber strategy is testament to this;
- making Cheltenham a net zero carbon council and town;
- revitalising the town centre and supporting sustainable, inclusive growth and recovery for all residents and communities;
- a £180m housing investment plan;
- the No Child Left Behind initiative.

To continue with these priorities in the current economic environment, he proposed a strategy which re-prioritised and re-set the budget from the bottom up, utilising resources, assets, skills and infrastructure in the most effective way, saying that long-term strategic commitments needed long-term financial planning. By working with stakeholders throughout the consultation process, and by fine-tuning services based on actual needs, over £1.5m-worth of efficiencies had been identified, through collaboration and additional revenue generation.

The budget proposal also included:

- an increase in revenue funding for the council's net zero carbon journey;
- reduction in the council's reliance on car parking income to support air quality improvement in the town centre;

- new capital funding of £75k for a pilot EV off-street charging hub;
- continued funding to support apprenticeship programme.

He said the budget proposed a modest council tax increase of 2.28% for the council's proportion of the bill – less than 10p a week for a Band D property. He put this in context by pointing out the real financial challenges arising from:

- inflation currently running at 5.5%;
- our energy bills increasing by 7.5%;
- employers' national insurance contributions increasing by 1.5% in April 2022;
- fuel prices and shortage of drivers placing additional demand on waste and recycling services, with an increase in volume of kerbside collections.

He said the council's recovery from the pandemic continued to be a key priority, and the strategy was focused on revitalising and reshaping the town's economy to ensure that future growth benefits all our communities. The aim was to encourage collaboration across all sectors to ensure culture, hospitality and creativity were woven into our economic recovery plans, in particular our cyber investment plans, the creative revitalisation of the town centre, and the imaginative use of open spaces.

He stated that the plans were financially sustainable to ensure delivery of key priorities, and that the council had the people, ambition and skills to drive the recovery forward. He thanked the council's finance team for working through the ongoing financial challenges, and all council officers who had been involved in bringing the budget together.

The budget proposal was seconded by Councillor Hay.

As no questions had been put forward in advance, the Mayor invited Members' questions to Cabinet Members.

There were no questions regarding the budget, but one Member referred back to an earlier question regarding the pilot scheme for a tourist information hub in the town centre, and asked whether there was sufficient budget provision to implement the outcome if the trial was to be a success. The Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business confirmed that part of the pilot was funded by the Welcome Back fund, but that additional funding would be required and that question is at the top of her list, to be discussed with the Cheltenham Trust.

The Mayor then invited group leaders to make their statements on the budget.

Councillor Payne, on behalf of People Against Bureaucracy (PAB), confirmed that his group would not be putting forward any amendments.

Councillor Harman, on behalf of the Conservative group, thanked all staff who had helped during the recent storms, including with refuse collection. He understood that communication had been good and people were well-informed of any changes.

Moving to the proposed budget amendments, he said he was always optimistic that the Conservative group could make an important contribution, with practical

ideas which will improve efficiency and make a real difference. He thanked officers for the preparation of the whole budget, and for helping his group work up their proposals which the S151 officer had confirmed as valid amendments.

The proposed amendments were as follows:

Recurring revenue: net £21k pa saving, balance to reserves

- reduced cabinet posts by three - £42k pa saving
- additional bring-site recycling collections at peak times - £11k pa
- free car parking after 6.00pm at Town Centre East car park - £10k pa

Capital/one-off revenue: net £150k one-off cost, balance from unallocated capital reserve

- bus station sustainability hub: seed funding for initial feasibility report - £50k one-off
- Platinum Jubilee green space/playground refurbishment fund - £5k per ward, £100k one-off

He said the group had decided not to include their previous proposal for whole council elections, pending the report on the Boundary Commission review at March Council. They still considered this to be a sensible option, however, which would bring Cheltenham into line with other Gloucestershire councils.

Referring to the group's recurring revenue proposals, he said that the size of the Cabinet could be reduced without affecting the performance of the council, with all functions retained and redistributed, and the savings could be put to good use. Additional bring-site recycling at peak times would be a good signal of the council's commitment to recycling, and free car-parking after 6.00pm at Town Centre East – the lowest revenue-raising carpark – would encourage people to Cheltenham and help market the town. His group supported the council's encouragement of alternative modes of transport, but the car will remain important, albeit electric or hybrid.

Regarding the proposed capital/one-off revenue proposals, he confirmed that at this stage his group was just suggesting a feasibility study on the bus station as a sustainability hub, admitting that it would be a complicated but valuable piece of work. The proposal of a Platinum Jubilee fund would provide borough councillors with the freedom to make improvements in their wards and would be open for 12 months.

He hoped that Members would consider the proposed amendments sensibly, and thanked Councillor Babbage for his support in bringing the proposals forward.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Harman, and invited the Leader of the PAB group to comment on the proposed budget.

The Leader of the PAB group welcomed the opportunity to comment on the budget proposals, and thanked officers for the clear narrative. His group was pleased to support the budget, acknowledging Cheltenham's positive position as it emerges from turbulent economic times, as a result of the S151 officer in partnership with the Cabinet – they are to be congratulated for this. He said supporting the budget means accepting all its elements, and present budget is a

partnership between the aspirations of the ruling party and the reality of available resources, which this year have included the added dimensions of changes in working practice, spiralling inflation, and failure of retail and hospitality to meet its full potential.

He approved the continued development of a medium-term strategy which would give financial stability, enable the council's economic recovery ambition through continued support of residents, businesses and communities, and support the climate change programme. He was reassured that the prominence of the carbon neutrality ambition was coming to the fore, welcoming the grant from the public sector decarbonisation scheme and awaiting with interest the publication of the climate investment strategy. He also welcomed the S151 officer's continued support of reserve funds, which provided an essential safety net to mitigate unexpected financial neutrality.

He noted that CBC's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 had been significantly hampered by the pandemic and although additional grant funding was welcome, PAB took the view that this was inadequate, and with uncertainty around government and county council support, wondered whether the council should perhaps temper its ambition and reset the timeline.

He also suggested that while a digital solution may be considered the best way to manage the changing nature of public interaction with the council, this may not be the right time, with many thousands of residents without access to or understanding of digital technology. He also questioned whether, in view of recent events in Europe highlighting the UK's dependency on imported energy, the council needed to revisit its ambition to divest from oil and gas and consider the security of its energy sources.

The meeting then adjourned from 3.50pm until 4.20pm, to allow the Cabinet to consider the conservative group's proposed amendments.

Upon reconvening, the conservative budget was formally proposed by Councillor Harman and seconded by Councillor Babbage.

In response, the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets said he was disappointed that the proposed amendments had not been raised earlier and rejected them in the manner presented, but addressed the points as follows:

- reducing the number of cabinet posts may seem feasible, but the Cabinet is the size it is because Members do a lot of work and already have to juggle their Cabinet responsibilities with their time as working members;
- there are already a number of one-off capital revenue schemes under consideration, including the TIC pod, public toilets and IT infrastructure; the bus station was being considered with the county council;
- the proposed Platinum Jubilee fund was recognised as a nice ambition, and £50k could be made available from the Green Economic Recovery and Investment Funding Reserve for this investment.

On behalf of the conservative group, Councillor Babbage said the group was disappointed that additional recycling collections and removal of car-parking charges were rejected, and that the development of the bus station, which had

been supported unanimously by Council, would not be taken forward. However, he welcomed the funding opportunity for councillors across the town to contribute ideas and thoughts to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and said that on this basis, the group would be willing to support the budget.

The Cabinet Minister Finance and Assets confirmed that the funding would be available on the Community Pride principle, available for community groups to put in bids, rather than for Members to decide where to spend the money.

The Mayor moved to a recorded vote on the proposed budget amendment.

FOR: (6): Babbage, Fifield, Harman, Mason, Nelson, Seacome

AGAINST: (21): Atherstone, Barrell, Bassett-Smith, Britter, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Harvey, Hay, Horwood, Jeffries, Lewis, McCloskey, Payne, Pinegar, Sankey, Stafford, Wheeler, Williams, Willingham.

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

The amendment was lost.

There were no questions for the S151 officer.

The Mayor then moved to the substantive motion, which was proposed by the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets and seconded by the Leader.

In response to a Member question, it was agreed that the wording for the proposed amendment would be worked out and added to the substantive motion, without the need for an additional vote.

In debate, Members thanked CBC and CBH officers for the huge amount of work involved in getting the budget together, commenting on how resilient the town had been throughout the pandemic, with an increase in pre-Christmas footfall and targets for carpark income reached. In response to a question from a Member as to whether there would be enough funds available this year to support revenue funds, the Executive Director Finance and Assets assured Members that, as the council's S151 officer, he is duty bound to give a full and comprehensive report (Appendix 2). He felt confident that reserves were adequate to meet the budget, and the medium-term financial strategy set out how reserves would be increased over time, giving financial stability over the next four years. He had considered all the things the council could face over the coming year, including 2% pay awards and increasing fuel prices, and Members could be assured that figures and reserves had been independently assessed.

The Leader of the Council said she was very happy to second this ambitious budget, and that the authority should feel rightly proud of its record over the last year – officers have worked hard, in collaboration, there have been no cuts, and a small amount of growth. She thanked the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets for all the hard work on his first budget.

The Mayor moved to a recorded vote on the following substantive motion:

It is recommended that Cabinet/Council:

- 1. Approve the revised budget for 2021/22 which is also reported separately in the 2021/22 budget monitor for 31 December 2021.**
- 2. Consider the budget assessment by the Section 151 Officer at Appendix 2 in agreeing the following recommendations.**
- 3. Approve the final budget proposals including a proposed council tax increase for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council for the year 2022/23 based on a Band D property (an increase of 2.28% or £5.00 a year for a Band D property), as detailed in paragraphs 4.14 to 4.19.**
- 4. Approve the savings / additional income totalling £1,507,000 and the budget strategy at Appendix 4.**
- 5. Approve the use of reserves and general balances and note the projected level of reserves, as detailed at Appendix 5.**
- 6. Approve the capital programme at Appendix 6.**
- 7. Approve the programmed maintenance programme at Appendix 7.**
- 8. Approve the flexible use of capital receipts strategy as detailed in Appendix 8.**
- 9. Note that the Council will remain in the Gloucestershire business rates pool for 2022/23 (paragraphs 4.4 to 4.13).**
- 10. Approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) detailed in Appendix 9.**
- 11. Approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23, including the continued payment of a living wage supplement at Appendix 10.**
- 12. Approve a level of supplementary estimate of £100,000 for 2022/23 as outlined in Section 14.**

with the following additional amendment added during debate:

13. Approve the use of £50k from the Green Economic Recovery and Investment Funding Reserve to establish a one-off Platinum Jubilee Community Fund and delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets to progress the governance arrangements for its administration.

FOR: (27): Atherstone, Babbage, Barrell, Bassett-Smith, Britter, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Fifield, Harman, Harvey, Hay, Horwood, Jeffries, Lewis, Mason, McCloskey, Nelson, Payne, Pinegar, Sankey, Seacome Wheeler, Wilkinson, Williams, Willingham.

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

AGAINST: (0)

The motion was carried.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets said that the uncertainty and volatility of the last 12 months had resulted in a continuous and mammoth amount of work, which had been personally challenging and would not have been possible without the support of officers. He thanked them, members of the cabinet who had a huge amount of involvement across their portfolios, and colleagues.

13. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2022-23

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report, setting out council tax arrangements for the borough, county and the Police and Crime Commissioner, which needed to be formally approved after approval of the budget.

In response to a Member's question, the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets confirmed that he was as confident as he could be that the £150 council tax rebate promised by the Chancellor would be paid centrally and not eat into the council's own budget; he would let Members know if anything changed

In debate, Members raised the following issues:

- it was important that the public be made aware that although CBC is the billing authority, its share of the council tax income is lower than that of the county and the PCC area;
- it should also be made clear that the £150 rebate would be a separate transaction – it would not be taken off at source, and CBC would not benefit from it.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets confirmed both these points, and recognised the hard work of officers in processing various payments and refunds introduced by government throughout the pandemic.

The Mayor then moved to the vote.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Council approve the formal Council Tax resolution at Appendix 2 and note the commentary in respect of the increase in Council Tax at Paragraph 6 of Appendix 2.

FOR: Atherstone, Babbage, Barrell, Bassett-Smith, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Fifield, Harman, Harvey, Hay, Horwood, Jeffries, Lewis, Mason, McCloskey, Nelson, Payne, Pineger, Sankey, Seacome, Wheeler, Wilkinson, Williams, Willingham (26) – unanimous

14. GAMBLING ACT 2005 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services presented the report, explaining that the council had a statutory duty to update and reconfirm its statement of principles every three years. He noted that Cheltenham had a long history as a place for gambling, most prominently through the racing festival but also through 13 other licensed gambling premises, as well as the council's own Cheltenham Lottery in support of local causes. He encouraged responsible gambling as a way to support the local economy, but stressed that they must be alert to the risks too.

These risks would be addressed according to three principles: namely that gambling must not have any association with crime or disorder, that it must be conducted in a fair and open way, and that children must be protected from its dangers. The council recognised that when the fun stopped, the gambling must stop too. In order to do this, he was working with the Public Health team to build up local risk profiles and risk assessments. He acknowledged that national legislation severely limited their ability to refuse licenses, since the presumption was always in favour of granting them.

The changes made since the last statement of principles three years ago were largely technical – for example, changing references to the reformed organisation overseeing child safety. He added that the Cheltenham Lottery would be unaffected by any of the changes, and that the modest response to consultation had been taken on board.

One Member asked whether the council could do about the issue of self-exclusion, which was a strong indicator of vulnerability to gambling addiction. The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services responded that this would form part of the risk assessment procedure they was being strengthened. Section 5.5 of the report referenced self-exclusion, with one solution being to share information with nearby treatment centres to most effectively identify and support those at risk.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- the focus on treating gambling addiction as a public health issue was welcomed, and similar to the county council's approach;
- the recently-introduced national legislation restricting the use of fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) was also welcomed.

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services agreed with both comments, saying the county council has a good team working on gambling

addiction as a public health issue, and that the reduction in the maximum bet on FOBTs from £100 to £2 would make a significant difference.

One Member added that in their role as Chair of Licensing Committee, they were happy with the report as it effectively targeted the areas of policy in which the council could play a role. Many areas of licensing policy were a matter for national government, but it was important for the council to act where it could. They noted that Appendix D contained a list of organisations offering help and advice to those affected by gambling addiction, and suggested that Members could direct potentially vulnerable constituents to this.

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services thanked Members for their contributions and asked that they approve the recommendations.

15. CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION PATHWAY AND STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency introduced his report, describing the climate emergency as the biggest challenge we face and one we cannot afford to ignore – both in respect of the long-term prosperity of humanity and from a simple financial perspective. He thanked the small but growing team at CBC, who have a wealth of knowledge and expertise, and reminded Members of the council's strong track record on environmental matters to date, as set out in the report. The council cannot achieve its aims without an all-encompassing formal plan, however, and is adopting a cross-party approach and working in partnership with CheltenhamZero and various public sector organisations to achieve its goals. The climate emergency action plan is a pathway to net zero, covering eight topic areas, each with a number of actions split into different time periods, and focussing on what CBC can deliver as an authority, and what needs involvement of others.

He said it was important to note the council would be bidding for government support in a number of areas, and the Cheltenham Green Deal will enable the council to back proposed actions with money. It will also be offering a local bond scheme, giving local people opportunity to invest in projects which help the planet and make a return too. He reminded Members that the key principle of the strategy is the willingness to change as a borough and take responsibility to act on this serious challenge, but that Cheltenham can be part of the global shift towards a cleaner, greener, more pleasant world – the first step is to voting today.

In response to questions from Members, the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency responded as follows:

- regarding progress on reducing carbon emissions of the council's own vehicles, the authority itself to account by reporting to Overview and Scrutiny, ensuring the right questions are asked, ditching diesel vehicles, moving towards alternative fuels etc, with more detail provided year on year;
- to tackle climate change deniers and conspiracy theorists, the plan encourages community engagement and, with Planet Cheltenham, is investigating the potential for community champions, as well as going into schools to help educate children about the issues at an early stage;

- climate justice is an important consideration – ensuring that people who can afford to bear the brunt do so, so that the less well-off are not unfairly impacted. This is mostly a national issue around tax, but local authorities can get involved by draught-proofing council housing and improving fuel efficiency;
- it is important that Cheltenham, as a festivals town, moves away from diesel generators for outside events on CBC land – the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business is working on an events strategy to incorporate this;
- whether Cheltenham made a big tree-planting pledge in partnership in 2019 with other Gloucestershire councils is debatable, but this is an indicative action alongside many others in the scoping report;
- with regard to planning standards – requiring all new development to be zero carbon, protecting key wildlife sites from development – a climate supplementary planning document is currently underway and will set a framework on which local planning applications can be judged. This will only carry a certain level of weight, but until national planning policy forces higher standards, it will at least inform the JCS and Local Plan, and demonstrate to developers that they will need to go above and beyond if they want to develop in Cheltenham.

In debate, Members enthusiastically welcomed the ambitious strategy, and commended both the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency for his championing of these vital issues and the climate emergency team for their hard work and expertise. They made the following comments:

- Cheltenham has already made a start, with its policy to have a zero-carbon taxi fleet by 2030, its first zero-carbon private housing development recently permitted in Leckhampton, on a brownfield site and including 40% affordable housing – a revolutionary moment. Solar panels have been installed on many CBH properties, but isolated instances cannot be relied upon, and mapping out a pathway is vital;
- inclusion of measures to combat the loss of biodiversity and threat to the eco-system – a crisis in its own right - in the plan is welcomed;
- there are a number of infrastructure initiatives which could help but would need county council investment – such as smart street-lighting which can be used, among other things, for EV charging, and electric hook-up for licensed events;
- while trees are nature’s way of removing CO2 from the atmosphere, there are technological solutions as well which would be worth investigating, and great potential for working in conjunction with tech start-ups at the Minster Exchange and with the cyber hub;
- the climate emergency pathway has crossovers to all portfolios, and it is exciting to see so many initiatives and projects starting to take shape.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency said Members had made some excellent points, which would have been heard by the team and would be acted upon.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that the Council:

- **notes the progress made to date;**
- **approves the emerging Climate Emergency Action Plan: Pathway to Net Zero, and delegates implementation to the Director for**

Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency and the Section 151 Officer;

- delegates authority to the Director for Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency and Section 151 Officer to commit expenditure from the allocated Climate Emergency budget;
- approves the 'Cheltenham Green Deal' (the climate change investment strategy).

16. ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

The Chief Executive Officer presented the report to Members, and asked that they ratify the order of preference as set out in the papers.

In the absence of any debate or questions, the Mayor moved to the vote:

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the Order of Precedence in Appendix 2 be noted.**
- **Councillor Sandra Holliday and Councillor Matt Babbage be put to the Annual Council Meeting for election as Mayor and Deputy Mayor respectively for the Municipal year 2022 - 2023.**

FOR: (27)

AGAINST: (0)

ABSTENTIONS: (0)

17. NOTICES OF MOTION

There were none.

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

There were none. The Mayor thanked the Chief Executive and officers.

Steve Harvey
Chairman