

Council

Monday, 17th October, 2022

2.30 - 5.25 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Sandra Holliday (Chair), Matt Babbage (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Rowena Hay, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Alisha Lewis, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Diggory Seacome, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Bassett-Smith, Fifield, Harvey and Savage.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July were approved unanimously and signed as a true record.

4. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR

The Mayor gave her personal thanks to officers of CBC and Ubico who had worked so hard following the death of Her Majesty The Queen, to ensure that all protocol was adhered to during the period of mourning, and events were handled sensitively. She also thanked members of the public and councillors who had laid flowers, signed the book of condolence, and shown support for events at the Municipal Offices.

She also reported that, since the last meeting, she had:

- attended a moving ceremony and laid sunflowers to mark Ukrainian Independence Day on 24 August, together with the Leader, Councillor Hay, and Alex Chalk, MP;
- joined the 20-year anniversary celebration of the Butterfly Garden at Dundry Nurseries. She said this scheme allows students to take part in many activities, including gardening, cookery and woodwork, and their achievements are always valued and celebrated. She encouraged Members to visit, either as a group

or individually. Anyone interested in a group visit should email Jennie Ingram;

- attended a fundraising reception at the Holst Victorian House, where trustees hope to raise £30k for further improvements. She encouraged Members to look at their website to see what is planned;
- invited Cheltenham Bowling Club National Top Club champions to the parlour to celebrate their success at winning the award out of 634 teams.

5. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader started by thanking Howard Norris for acting as interim Monitoring Officer for the past year, before reporting on the following:

- CBC won a Federation of Small Business Local Authority Award for Best Covid-19 Support and Recovery for the south-west region, in recognition of the variety of innovative methods used to help businesses during the pandemic. This included road-widening schemes, relaxed planning requirements for temporary structures, business grants for struggling businesses, and adoption of an in-depth recovery strategy in May 2020. She congratulated all involved;
- at the Gloucestershire Business Awards last week, Ubico was a well-deserved finalist in the Local Business Heroes category, for keeping its services going throughout the pandemic;
- in late September, Radio Gloucestershire's Make A Difference awards recognised the many individuals and organisations which give up their time to make a significant difference to their local communities. Sarah Avery was one of the many deserving winners;
- CBC is providing vital support to the most vulnerable during the energy crisis, having already allocated over £70k, with a further £92k due to be paid out by the end of November. Payments of £150 will go to families in receipt of council tax support or housing benefit, there will be extra support for anyone hosting a Ukrainian family, and any remaining funding will be distributed to over 700 pensioners aged over 80 who receive council tax support or housing benefit – they will each receive £100;
- last week, the Golden Valley Development won the Property Deal of the Year award at the Inside Property Awards, recognition of and testament to the fantastic team working on this unique and exciting project, which is putting Cheltenham at the front and centre of the national and international stage.

She finished by explaining the reason and rationale for Cheltenham not giving support to Gloucestershire County Council's expression of interest in becoming an investment zone, as required in the guidance. The government announcement gave a very short timeline and insufficient guidance, with the lack of detail potentially giving rise to insurmountable unknown risks. She has asked Democratic Services to share the letter she sent to GCC with Members, and also the four different government departments involved in the investment zones.

6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

The Mayor confirmed that no petitions had been received.

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Caroline Sherwood to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	<p>You may be aware of a lengthy discussion on Next Door community noticeboard regarding the dismay of many members of the community about the loss of our Tourist Information Centre. We have observed the limited space for displaying leaflets in the new 'hub' on the High Street and the fact that the site is very often unattended (it has always been closed when I have walked past). Many people do not use the internet. Tourists in town have been discovered expressing confusion at the lack of a proper TIC, and have even been directed to local facilities and points of interest by members of the public! Many diverse events take place in our rich and varied town which do not get posted to the internet and are advertised by poster or flyer. An allied concern is the inaccessibility for many of the new box office for the Town Hall at Leisure at Cheltenham, Tommy Taylors Lane. Would the Council consider reinstating a staffed centrally located TIC which carries information about all events taking place in town (including the Festivals and those at the Town Hall) with a noticeboard where local groups can post flyers about changing and lively range of events available?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I'd like to thank the users of Next Door for raising this issue, because it's important that local people have an eye on our town's tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.</p> <p>Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.</p> <p>Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what's on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.</p> <p>The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions.</p> <p>Prior to the pandemic lockdowns, tourist information was housed in The Wilson, but that could not be described as a Tourist Information Centre. As part of the successful redesign of The Wilson and the work to boost the local area after the pandemic lockdowns, the decision was taken to place the Visit Cheltenham pod in the High Street - a more central location, hosting a large town map, what's on posters, and free town tourist guides.</p> <p>The initial trial period of the Cheltenham Pod has been extended, but as part of the extension we are rethinking how the Pod can best work for tourists, local community groups and businesses too. As part of this, we are exploring the options for the Pod to be staffed on weekend days from Spring 2023. This approach would give Cheltenham</p>

	<p>visitors access to tourism information in physical town centre locations seven days per week.</p> <p>Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.</p> <p>The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers.</p> <p>The location of the Cheltenham Trust box office is an operational matter for the Cheltenham Trust. However, the location does not exclude anyone from purchasing tickets for any Cheltenham Trust events or shows. Physical events listings brochures are available and can be posted to anyone interested. The box office ticket line enables people who do not have internet access to purchase tickets via a more traditional method. All tickets can be sent by post or picked up on the door at events, so nobody is excluded. Anyone who wishes to collect tickets ahead of events and is unwilling to use the postal service is of course welcome to pick them up from the box office at Leisure@.</p> <p>Finally, it may be instructive to note that Bath, often held up as an example of best practice in tourism, has closed its Visitor Information Centre.</p>
2.	Question from Susan Oscroft to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	<p>What plans are there for a Tourist Information Centre in central Cheltenham to replace The Wilson facility? The current booth on the High Street is not compatible with the town's claim to be the centre of Cotswolds tourism.</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for the question. It's important that local people have an eye on our town's tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.</p> <p>Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.</p> <p>Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what's on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.</p> <p>The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions.</p>

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Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.

The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers.

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3. Question from Jim Markland to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Sometime ago Cheltenham very understandably declared itself to be the "Festival Town". As life returns to normal post Covid it seems time that Cheltenham "walked the talk", lived up to its ambitions and prepared to properly welcome visitors to the Festivals and the town. As such it is worthwhile thinking of what a visitor might seek out and would appreciate.

Looking at this from my own experience I would suggest a focal point where visitors (and residents!) could obtain assistance with such as the following:

- Late accommodation availability
- Transport local and national
- Parking
- Cycle hire and routes
- Maps and directions including bus routes
- Restaurants/Bars
- Shopping
- Travel tickets such as National Express
- Local walks and points of interest including guided walks
- Local History
- Tickets for events such as all at Cheltenham Theatres
- First Class Public Toilets

At the moment it seems to me that the provision for visitors to the town is sadly lacking, yet we all know too well how useful it is to have such facilities available when visiting any tourist destination, and how much better it is to be able to talk to a well-informed local person than to depend on a computer search.

A centrally located properly functioning tourist information supported by a welcome team (and potentially local societies) cannot fail to be an improvement on the status quo. Please could Cheltenham Borough Council explain their policy and plans with regard to such services?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for the question. It's important that local people have an eye on our town's tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.

Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.

Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what's on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.

The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions. Anyone seeking information on the matters you have raised in your question will be able to use these terminals and though it will not be possible to buy physical tickets from this location, tickets will be available from the relevant outlet, whether that is Cheltenham Festivals, the Everyman Theatre, at Cheltenham Trust venue or a transport provider.

Prior to the pandemic lockdowns, tourist information was housed in The Wilson, but that could not be described as a Tourist Information Centre. As part of the successful redesign of The Wilson and the work to boost the local area after the pandemic lockdowns, the decision was taken to place the Visit Cheltenham pod in the High Street - a more central location, hosting a large town map, what's on posters, and free town tourist guides.

The initial trial period of the Cheltenham Pod has been extended, but as part of the extension we are rethinking how the Pod can best work for tourists, local community groups and businesses too. As part of this, we are exploring the options for the Pod to be staffed on weekend days from Spring 2023. This approach would give Cheltenham visitors access to tourism information in physical town centre locations seven days per week.

Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online

	<p>channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.</p> <p>The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers. All of the information referenced in the question is available on the Visit Cheltenham digital platforms and that is the most appropriate place for accessing such information.</p> <p>Finally, it may be instructive to note that Bath, often held up as an example of best practice in tourism, has closed its Visitor Information Centre.</p>
4.	Question from Anne Regan to Cabinet Member, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	<p>It is with great dismay when attending the Museum in Clarence Street I learnt that the Tourist Information Desk was no longer in use and had been moved to a kiosk in the High street.</p> <p>When visiting the kiosk on several occasions it was unmanned with only a few paper leaflets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Why have you closed down one of national industries big earners for towns and cities? b) Are you aware of the loss of income to our town and has that loss been calculated? c) How are visitors able to book various location visits in the Cotswolds without a TIO? d) How are visitors able to find their way around Cheltenham and book venues? e) With the evolving loss of shops etc why is a TIO not relevant to this administration?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you to former councillor Regan for her question. It is good to hear from her and I'm sorry to learn of her dismay. I can understand that for the majority of her long and dedicated service to this Borough the world will have been a different place and a traditional Tourist Information Centre would have been the default approach. In 2022, local authorities must bridge the gap between providing tourism information for people in the way in which most people expect: online, and physical tourism information. We accept that physical tourist information is still required for those who cannot access the internet via a smart phone during visits. That is why this authority is moving to an arrangement to provide tourism information as described in answers to questions 1 to 3. Despite the detail in my earlier answers, I am happy to provide answers to the five questions posed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The council has not "closed down one of national industries big earners for towns and cities", as former councillor Regan suggests. Tourism Information Centres typically make a loss. b) This is not calculable, though the premise of the question is rejected because there is no evidence. Indeed, in 2021 the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million visits. I would suggest that this is significantly more annual visitors than any Tourist Information Centre that Cheltenham has ever had. c) Via the providers directly. This will mostly happen via online bookings, but alternative modes of communication are available. d) To navigate Cheltenham, Google Maps would probably be the default app for the 84 per cent of the population who have access to a smart phone (other map apps are available). For those without access to the internet, Visit Cheltenham supplies free paper tear-off maps to various tourist and visitor destinations around Cheltenham. Anyone wishing to book a venue would typically contact that venue directly by phone, email or in person.

	<p>Sending a letter or a social media message might also be an option. One of the marvels of the modern world is that we have access to multiple modes of communication.</p> <p>e) The retail environment has indeed been impacted by a number of factors, including changing consumer habits, the government's failure to reform the broken business rates system and high rents for commercial properties. The coming cost of living crisis will undoubtedly provide further challenges. Former councillor Regan will be interested to note that this authority is working with Cheltenham BID and a respected retail consultant to fill empty shops. Enforcement action will be taken against empty premises which have been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. The TIO element of this question has clearly been superseded by answers elsewhere.</p> <p>Noting the general theme of her question, I am sure former councillor Regan will be pleased to read the detailed answers to other questions, which deal directly with the substantive matter of tourism information.</p>
<p>5. Question from Anne Regan to Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Victoria Atherstone</p>	
	<p>a) How many empty properties are there in Cheltenham Town Centre above retail premises?</p> <p>b) Has the Council approached any of the landlords and how many?</p> <p>c) Has the Council considered the number of homes that could be provided by conversion?</p> <p>d) Has the Council sought funding streams from outside bodies for financially covering conversions?</p> <p>e) Has the Council a timeline for this type of project?</p>
<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>	
	<p>Thank you Anne for your questions about trying to identify more potential residential property in our town centre above retail premises.</p> <p>In partnership with the Cheltenham BID, the Council is currently working on a programme, approaching retail property landlords to address empty retail units in the town centre. This activity will include a review of the current status of empty shops in key streets, as well as business engagement and potential enforcement action by the Council against landlords who do not ensure their premises are well-maintained. It will also lead to work to promote vacancies to encourage new retailers and businesses to move to the town centre.</p> <p>We have also fairly recently conducted a review to identify how many long-term vacant residential properties above retail premises there are in the town centre area, this currently stands at ten. Some years ago, the Council did offer financial assistance through grant aid to help landlords of retail properties, convert living spaces above their property. Unfortunately the take-up was very low and not purely down to the unwillingness of the landlords but also due to structural barriers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fire safety due the design of such buildings • lack of shop flexibility associated with storage capacity • security concerns • heritage constraints associated with separate access to the residential accommodation <p>Although there are such barriers in many cases, there is also always scope to find more opportunities to work with landlords to provide such accommodation.</p> <p>It is also worth noting, the Council is currently working on a programme through the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Strategic Plan, to assess the urban capacity of the borough; this includes opportunities across the town centre and will assess the future development needs of our area.</p>

	<p>Including highlighting the possible need for more town centre residential accommodation, as we do not currently know the number of retail premises capable of conversion to provide such accommodation.</p> <p>After the conclusion of this programme of work, the Council may seek opportunities to secure similar funding streams, as we did before, from outside bodies to help retail landlords cover some of the costs for such conversions.</p>
6.	Question from Dr Cook to Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas
	<p>I am pleased to see the council has been using the “No child left behind” public health informed approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable children. The council will be aware that people are said to be experiencing fuel poverty when they cannot afford to heat their home to a reasonable temperature. Before the pandemic, over 13% of all households in England (3.2 million households) were living in fuel poverty, according to government figures. The British Medical Journal reports that “children growing up in cold, damp, and mouldy homes with inadequate ventilation have higher than average rates of respiratory infections and asthma, chronic ill health, and disability. They are also more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and slower physical growth and cognitive development.” Most families will face significant adversity this winter, due to inflation, rising housing costs & rising energy prices. In particular, the government's plans for real terms cut in benefits, will affect poorer families the most. Therefore, the council will be aware that many people in Cheltenham will be very likely to experience significant risks to their health, placing more burden on the NHS, and we can expect a large rise in the number of people, including families, being at risk of, and becoming homeless. In view of these major risks, I surmise that the insufficient action by the council, having at this stage, only offered people advice on keeping warm, the council is complicit in harming children, who will be exposed to fuel poverty & its consequences, and therefore it appears the council has abandoned the No Child Left Behind Approach. In order to continue the good work of the council, especially to protect the most vulnerable this winter, will the council commit to further work on its “Cost of Living Emergency” declaration in July 2022, in particular, will the council use existing networks to promote sources of support for vulnerable people & families, including promoting the council’s ability to take enforcement action on inadequate private rentals, will the council make such promotion more accessible, such as posters, leaflets, and talks, via schools, social services, GP surgeries, public transport and the library? Will all councillors commit to giving some of their time to educate the communities within their local wards?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for your question Dr Cook.</p> <p>Whilst there is much within your question with which I agree, I would like to go through some of the work that has been done both by the Council and with our partners in order to reassure you that the Council remains very much committed to both No Child Left Behind and to supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. The link to the council report recommitting to NCLB in March 2022.</p> <p>https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s39665/2022_03_21_COU_No_Child_Left_Behind.pdf</p> <p>As a reminder, No Child Left Behind, which was begun some four years ago, is a local partnership that is working to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the issue of child poverty; • Address the inequality gap through events and activities; and

- Work together to make transformational change over the longer-term.

The No Child Left Behind Partnership is incredibly strong. We have built a town-wide coalition of like-minded partners who are determined to take action so that all our children have the opportunity to thrive. To date 24 schools have signed up alongside 57 organisations including 16 businesses.

No Child Left Behind works closely with local schools, both with our primary schools through the Cheltenham Learning Partnership and secondary schools through Cheltenham Education Partnership. Both our laptops for learning programme and our holiday activity schemes have reached out to every school in Cheltenham.

Through No Child Left Behind we have successfully run the Government holiday activity and food programmes for local children on free school meals with 778 children attending, 1034 activity sessions provided directly by No Child Left Behind and many more children reached by partner organisations. In addition 2,000 food hampers were made available through the HAF programme to children and families over the summer holidays thanks to #FeedCheltenham Partners.

Under the banner of No Child Left Behind, the council has worked extensively with our community food network, #feedcheltenham, to make sure that our children and indeed our families are able to access warm spaces this winter.

All our community food providers have seen significant increases in the number of customers they are seeing. But this increase in demand comes at a time when both the cost to them of food and energy is rising and the amount of food being donated is dropping off leading to a cash squeeze on their finances – we have estimated that this gap equates to £2k per week across four community food pantries.

In response, the council has agreed financial support worth £65k which have gone to seven community food providers. These grants will help support the organisational resilience of these community food providers and recognise the hard work that is being done to alleviate the cost of living crisis faced by our local residents.

In addition, to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis, we are working with our community food providers we are about to launch a campaign called #warmcheltenham.

This will have three elements:

- A network of warm spaces that people can drop into keep warm if they can't afford to heat their homes during the day. So far 7 community venues have come on board but more are being encouraged to join-up. A campaign called donate the rebate to encourage more affluent people in receipt of the £400 energy rebate to donate this to the warmcheltenham campaign.
- An advice leaflet that will be pushed out via community centres, libraries, schools and GP practices

We use Household Support Fund which is DWP money channelled via GCC to districts to ensure financial support gets to those that are most vulnerable in our communities. We are using this to support a range of community partners – see below.

Provider	Household Support Fund Activity	allocation
#feedcheltenham	Supermarket food vouchers and	50,175

	food pantry tokens	
Cheltenham Children Centres	Household items (eg cleaning / toiletries) for vulnerable families with under 5s, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	21,262.5
Food Bank - energy vouchers	Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers provision via Cheltenham Food Bank, CCP and Springbank	52,537.5
CHEP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	11,700
CCP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	11,700
Citizen's advice	Clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	2475
		149,850

I agree with you Dr Cook that the issue in relation to health is significant and that's why we work with health partners also. Working with NHS partners, we have recently devised and launched a grant scheme that offers grants of up to £10k for community-based organisations to support individuals or communities that face health inequalities that are likely to have been worsened by the pandemic and/or the cost of living crisis.

In addition, through Heads Up we are working extensively with our partners to try to ensure that mental health issues are kept at a minimum and have just initiated a cross sector task group to research the lived experience of young people to investigate concerns including eating disorders, abuse on social media platforms and anxiety around the future. This will support further partnership work to help our young people during this very challenging time.

I hope this response makes it clear that this council is very much committed to supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis and that this commitment includes our officers and, with a nod to your last question, all my councillor colleagues who will be working tirelessly to support their local residents.

Supplementary question

Thank you for that comprehensive answer, it is helpful to consider what the community of Cheltenham has done. Can the Cabinet Member explain what enforcement activity, such as rent repayment orders (as implemented by the Council in 2018) and preventions of no-fault evictions, the council plans to make?

Response from Cabinet Member

I do not have that information to hand but will provide you with a written answer in due course.

7. Question from Dr Cook to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rowena Hay

In light of the report by the Liberal Democrat National Party Standards Office, which found Mayor Sandra Holliday guilty of bullying, and suspended her membership of the Party for 12 months, will the Leader of the Council inform the people of Cheltenham, whether the Leader of the Council

	believes Councillor Holliday's position as Mayor of Cheltenham, and Councillor for St Mark's Ward, is compatible with the Nolan Principles, "to treat all persons fairly and with respect" and to "lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role" when Councillor Holliday has been determined to have acted as a bully and a racist by her own Party?
Response from the Leader of the Council	
	Good afternoon Dr Cook, as your question is directed to the Leader of the Council, I am responding in that position. The matter that you refer to was dealt with by the national Liberal Democrat Party, and I am not privy to the complaint in detail. I have been informed of the outcome, namely that Cllr Holliday is suspended from being a member of the party for a period of 12 months. The national party will, I am certain, have had the Nolan Principles at the forefront of their minds in coming to the conclusion that they did.
Supplementary question	
	Can the Leader of the Council confirm that she has not read the decision notice from the Liberal Democrats Complaints Panel issued on 20 September, which states on page 8 that the Leader of CBC and all Liberal Democrat councillors would receive a copy?
Response from the Leader of the Council	
	I can confirm that I received the decision notice stating the outcome of the complaint, and shared it with all Lib Dem councillors as requested by the party. I was not privy to the panel itself, which was not in the public domain.

8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Cllr Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Finance, Assets ad Regeneration, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	Will the Cabinet Member confirm the cost of the recent refurbishment to the Reception area in the Municipal Offices?
Response from Cabinet Member	
	The cost of the building works, refurbishment of the new reception and provision of new office space on the ground floor is £121k. This includes all design, build and finish costs for the space which now provides a number of different ways in which customers can access support and advice from the Council. An additional £7k has been spent to furnish the offices, meeting rooms, customer phone terminals and breakout space which can be used by customers and officers.
2.	Question from Cllr Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Finance, Assets ad Regeneration, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	Will the cabinet member indicate how many staff normally based at the Municipal Offices work remotely, how many regular attend in person and how often staff working remotely attend the offices?
Response from Cabinet Member	
	This answer includes only Council employees and not staff working for other organisations who are based at or lease space in the Municipal Office building.

	<p>There are approximately 250 Council officers whose base office is the Municipal Office building. This also includes officers who are customer facing and may undertake most of their work outside of the office.</p> <p>The recent changes to the office building, including the re-opening of the Reception to the public and rationalisation of office space and move to agile working arrangements has supported a more hybrid working environment.</p> <p>Staff are now able to work between the office and home more flexibly and there is more fit for purpose space for staff such as the Neighbourhood team or Parking Enforcement officers to drop into the office between the time they are moving around the town.</p> <p>The office accommodation project was set up before COVID-19 and occupancy numbers at that stage were around 56% which equates to around 140 staff. The new layouts on the ground and first floor allow for 122 working spaces for Council officers, Publica staff, SWAP and One Legal.</p> <p>A full survey on occupancy post COVID-19 has not yet been completed but an indicative survey undertaken on four days following the receipt of this question showed an average of 63 Council officers were based in the office for at least some of the day.</p> <p>The occupancy of the office will continue to be monitored to ensure that the space continues to meet their needs and be fit for purpose for hybrid working.</p>
Supplementary question	
	<p>I can see that things are still ongoing and people are working hard, but the building does feel empty. Given the energy issues we face at the moment and the cost of running this building, what other steps can we take to increase home working and reduce energy costs?</p>
Response from Cabinet Member	
	<p>As you rightly say, there is a lot of empty space in this building. There is an ongoing process of consolidation and review to ensure the building is making best use of its office space and not wasting energy.</p>
3.	Question from Cllr John Payne to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Alisha Lewis
	<p>The decision by the Planning Committee to approve the Ice Rink for one year, was described by the Chair as a balanced decision, taking into account the economic benefit to the town and its businesses against the 100 tons of NO₂ that would be produced from the generators. 100 tons is a relatively small amount when compared to the total pollution burden in Cheltenham, but the 100 ton burden is being delivered over a relatively short period of time in a very restricted area. On the theme of balance what plans do CBC have to offset this burden, and restore the Council's reputation as a Council committed to climate change?</p>
Response from Cabinet Member	
	<p><i>Background: Last Christmas, the ice rink in Imperial Gardens used a total of 44,530 litres of standard diesel equating to 117.51 tonnes CO₂e (Please note: Not NO₂ as per question). Based on our declared emissions in 2020-21 of 5,070 tonnes CO₂e, the ice rink generators therefore increased the council's total organisational emissions by 2.32% in 2021-22. This figure related to diesel use only.</i></p>

	<p>Officers are currently working on plans for the ice rink this Christmas and the current tendering exercise reflects the need to adhere to planning conditions relating to fuel type, emissions and noise. Both Cabinet and the Planning Committee have made clear that the rink must have a lower carbon footprint and cannot rely on standard diesel. Final details about the ice rink are expected to be confirmed during October.</p> <p>Officers are requesting information about the sustainability of all potential suppliers through the procurement process and will score responses against this. Suppliers are required to include in their Tender submission what procedures they have in place to reduce or eliminate single use products (such as plastic), supply chain miles, arrangements for recycling, and other sustainability methods and measures. In particular the suppliers of power to the site will be expected to provide information about procedures in place to reduce the carbon impact of fuel sources and supply chain miles, as well as demonstrating they have an effective and comprehensive sustainability policy and other sustainability methods and measures.</p> <p>As reported at scrutiny committee earlier this year, the Council is involved in a wide range of projects aligned to the Carbon Emergency Action Plan adopted in February this year and is targeting a reduction in its own energy use of 20% over the next 12 months. In addition, the property team is looking at the feasibility of installing an upgraded mains electricity supply to Imperial and Montpellier Gardens, to help reduce the carbon impact of future event-related activities. This is the subject of a funding bid at present and more information will be available in due course.</p>
	Supplementary question
	Thank you for a comprehensive and eloquent reply and for correcting an error of mine. What I am not clear about, and would be grateful if you would clarify, is what exactly the council will do to mitigate the 100 tons of CO2?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	I would love to give a very comprehensive answer to this, but we are still currently in the procurement process and will need to wait until we have a fuller picture of the situation.
4.	Question from Cllr Wendy Flynn to the Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	<p>Gloucestershire County Council is moving forward with plans to install 1,000 on-street electric vehicle charging points over the next 3 years.</p> <p>Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) owns approximately 5000 homes, managed by Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH).</p> <p>What plans do CBC and CBH have to install, or facilitate the installation of, charging points at the homes of tenants wishing to use an electric vehicle and will efforts be made to secure some of the County's 1000 points for tenants living in council housing and, in particular, council owned flats?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is planning to install 1,000 electric vehicle charging points across the county. The main focus of this project will be residential locations without off street parking; their aim is to create a wide geographical spread of charging points. GCC will soon be consulting CBC officers on a list of potential proposed locations for charging points.

	<p>This will give CBC the opportunity to advise on the potential for some of these to be secured for the benefit of council tenants (in collaboration with Cheltenham Borough Homes). Any final decisions regarding the actual location of these charging points will be subject to further detailed feasibility checks etc. (e.g. network capacity) by GCC.</p> <p>Please note that council tenants who wish to install their own electric vehicle charging points can do so with our permission, via Cheltenham Borough Homes. At present, only a very small number of tenants have made such requests, but we do anticipate that demand will rise, so Cheltenham Borough Homes will lead on developing a policy which will help provide clarity to tenants on the processes that have to be followed before any permissions can be granted.</p>
	Supplementary question
	<p>Will the Cabinet Member consider a scheme (maybe in conjunction with the county) for council tenants and leaseholders where CBH arranges the installation of a charging point and invoices the tenant at cost price, thus ensuring quality and safety and enabling tenants to benefit from economies of scale?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>This is a sound idea and one that we have already discussed with CBH. We would have to work in partnership with Cllr. Lewis and look to collaborate with the county council, especially with on-street parking.</p>
5.	Question from Cllr Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Cllr Max Wilkinson
	<p>Anyone visiting Cheltenham seeking Tourist Information might do one of two things...</p> <p>Those who have a smart phone (apparently 84% of the adult population) might look on Google Maps, and those without, (the remaining 16%!) will likely head for the town centre (in Cheltenham's case probably Montpellier or the Promenade) and seek out prominent notice boards or similar.</p> <p>So, what is Google Maps response? A search for "Tourist Information Centre Cheltenham" only gives results showing Bourton on the Water and Winchcombe.... plus a reference to 77 Promenade, Cheltenham – "Permanently Closed", but thankfully also listing the website link for visitcheltenham.com.</p> <p>How will the 16% (est 320,000 people / year) get on?</p> <p>Well, depending on where they find themselves and assuming they are somewhere near the town centre, they may come across one of two types of information maps / notice boards currently displayed around town.</p> <p>There are the traditional distinctive black Cheltenham Spa Information notice boards – all containing "VISIT CHELTENHAM The Festival Town" maps with the familiar "i" clearly shown on the map and including a large yellow highlighted block specifically advertising the Cheltenham Tourist Information Centre located at the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum.</p> <p>These classic display boards are sited at various prime locations around the town. Two of the most prominent are sited, one by Neptune's Fountain and another adjacent to the Long Gardens (Gloucestershire Constabulary). There are similar displays around the town including one by Imperial Gardens, another further along the Prom opposite Martin & Co and another on</p>

	<p>the High Street (by The Entertainer).</p> <p>Bearing in mind that those without smart phones may possibly be less mobile, they will then make their way to The Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum only to find no TIC there!</p> <p>There are also several, more modern look, notice boards at strategic sites around the town including in Montpellier (by entrance to Montpellier Gardens), Imperial Square (outside 131), Imperial Gardens (outside the Quadrangle), at Neptune’s Fountain, on the Promenade (by the Minotaur) and on the High Street (opposite TSB), again all containing maps showing where the “i” (TIC).... is.... At the Wilson!</p> <p>Some of these boards are in a sorry state, damaged and with graffiti. Bath Parade Car Park also has a Cheltenham Spa Information board, this time with an attached black metal box - “Cheltenham Town Centre Map Available Here for £1”!</p> <p>Whose job is it to keep these up to date? Given the high footfall of tourists into the Town, particularly during key festivals such as the current Literature Festival, surely these strategic sites should be checked, updated and maintained?</p> <p>This does not reflect well on the town’s ambitions to attract more tourists.</p> <p>Please explain why it has taken so long to update this crucial town centre tourist information on these noticeboards at a time when we are trying to encourage visitors to our town?</p> <p>This administration are now covering Tourist Information in a small POD on the High Street, displaying the “VISIT CHELTENHAM the Festival Town” logo. The pod is often locked and unmanned - how do visitors to Cheltenham find this pod?</p> <p>We were told that the pod in the High Street is a trial, now extended, that there were plans to change the set-up at the pod, or ‘information exchange’, and we could expect more developments at the pod in September.... What developments?</p> <p>How long will this trial be? How will you judge whether the trial is a success or not? What criteria will you use? How can the High Street be seen as a “more central” tourist location than The Promenade, home to Neptune’s Fountain, the Minotaur, The Long Gardens and the War Memorial??</p> <p>Would you consider siting a TIC in the newly refurbished and splendid Municipal Office Reception Area where it could be manned – surely this would be an excellent location for a fully functional TIC?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>Thank you to Councillor Nelson for submitting such a lengthy and detailed comment. For clarity of response I have attempted to extract the direct questions posed:</p> <p>1(a) Whose job is it to keep these up to date? and 1(b) Surely these strategic sites should be checked, updated and maintained?</p> <p>My assumption is that you are referring to various information and wayfinding boards around the town. These are the responsibility of the Borough Council townscape team. Officers are investigating a solution and the removal of erroneous signs for tourist information is a priority.</p> <p>2. We were told that the pod in the High Street is a trial, now extended, that there were plans to change the set-up at the pod, or ‘information exchange’, and we could</p>

	<p>expect more developments at the pod in September.... What developments?</p> <p>Councillor Nelson may have noted updates to event signs in the Pod. Councillor Nelson may also have noted posters advertising the Pod for use by community groups. In recent days, she may have noted that University students used the Pod. A defibrillator has also been installed there, courtesy of the Public Hearts Cheltenham Defibrillator Campaign.</p> <p>3. How long will this trial be? How will you judge whether the trial is a success or not? What criteria will you use?</p> <p>The initial trial period has been extended for an indefinite period. Success will be judged by the number of community groups that take up an offer to use the Pod space, as well as revenue generated by hires from businesses. In due course, when the possible use as a tourism information base from next spring is realised, that will also feature in the success criteria.</p> <p>4. Would you consider siting a TIC in the newly refurbished and splendid Municipal Office Reception Area where it could be manned – surely this would be an excellent location for a fully functional TIC?</p> <p>Yes. That is exactly what is happening. For more information, Councillor Nelson can refer to the answers to public questions put to today’s meeting.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question</p>
	<p>Thank you for a very lengthy and comprehensive response. Within the initial question, I asked why it has taken so long to update the crucial tourist information boards in the Town Centre, at a time when we are trying to encourage more visitors to the town.</p> <p>In an answer to an earlier public question, you stated that tourism information was currently available from Monday-Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, but this doesn’t seem to be the case.</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>I had been assured that tourist information would be available in the new Municipal Offices reception before this meeting, I apologise if this isn’t the case yet and will follow it up.</p> <p>We have lots of different wayfinding signs, some of which are very old and some of which are newer, with various information on. Officers are working on a new wayfinding strategy at the moment, and I will update Council as and when this is in place.</p>

9. HEATING AND ENERGY POLICY

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency introduced the report, saying that everyone was aware of the current cost-of-living crisis and spiralling energy costs, and that as well as making sure residents have access to advice and information, the council must lead by example and take action to lower its own energy bills, while protecting its finances and the planet. Its large portfolio, which includes Trust properties and Cheltenham Borough Homes, results in high energy use, and the report sets out a pathway, starting with benchmarking to understand better our energy use and make sure solutions are equitable, and taking account of changes in the way we operate, such as encouraging on-line meetings where possible, retrofitting older buildings rather than demolishing them, and looking for innovative solutions such as solar power. She thanked the climate, finance and property teams for their hard work, and asked

Members, as civic custodians of the property portfolio, to make sure they lived according to the principles in the document and encouraged partnership organisations to do the same – meeting Net Zero is a team sport, and we must work together to achieve our climate goals.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency for her comprehensive and diligent report. In response to Members' questions, she said:

- she was conscious that the Municipal Offices are old and large, with a heating system that doesn't work as well as we would like. She confirmed that its future was under constant review, and where possible, officers were encouraged to work from home;
- she had no reports of staff currently working from home deciding to work in the office to save on heating bills, so could give no opinion on the potential implications of this - she will make some enquiries;
- regarding the council's carbon footprint, consideration of this tended to focus on its properties rather than any increase incurred by encouraging staff to work at the office rather than at home, resulting in additional vehicle use, single-use plastic and so on. The council is always looking for alternative solutions, encouraging staff to understand the impact of what they do, and looking at ways to be more sustainable – it was all about finding the best ways to do business with the lowest possible climate impact;
- regarding Scope 3 emissions, which seem to be quite low in the report, those of the council are different from those of an average business, and she hopes to present meaningful and accurate statistics, looking at work the council and its partners do. It is an ongoing project;
- she confirmed that Cheltenham Trust is a key priority in the report, particularly as it includes many beautiful heritage buildings which the council wants to preserve for future generations while reducing operation costs;
- she shared a Member's concern that energy, gas and water usage would no longer be included in tenants' service agreements, leaving them responsible for managing their own consumption. She did not want to leave tenants at the risk of the market with prices spiralling, and was working with the public sector decarbonisation fund, looking to retro-fit existing properties, and making sure future properties were more sustainable and cheaper to run and heat. Cheltenham Trust is the focus of the report, but CBH tenants will always have support.

Members then moved to the debate, where the following points were made:

- CBC is taking the climate crisis issue very seriously, and will need to take a more pragmatic planning approach to support residents and businesses who want to make their conservation area or listed homes and buildings more energy efficient, with solar panels, double glazing, air source heat pumps and so on. Officers are

understandably bound by policy, which leads them to recommend refusal, but Planning Committee is more inclined to permit these proposals going forward;

- Cheltenham's bigger buildings face tough decisions, such as the Lido, which will see a huge increase in its energy bill when its fixed term contract comes to an end;
- consideration should also be given to smaller buildings which are now surplus to council requirements, such as the building in Sandford Park – should this be sold off to a developer, demolished, or re-purposed?
- the report is very welcome, but with the climate emergency declared in 2019 and the cost-of-living crisis in July, the council needs to act faster – it is not being responsive enough;
- the energy cap will now not apply after April, which will have a huge impact on people all across the country. It would be helpful if the Cabinet Member could look into this and bring a report to the next meeting;
- the report doesn't just set out new ideas but also highlights what the council has already done to tackle the climate emergency. The declared climate emergency, motions, and adopted supplementary planning document set out the assumptions we want private developers to make regarding renewable energy, and the next review of the Cheltenham Plan and Joint Core Strategy (Joint Spatial Plan) should include very strong policies to combat climate change and energy use. The Planning Committee has made some brave decisions, including to permit the first zero carbon private housing development in Leckhampton, which demonstrates the council's commitment to take this agenda forward;
- it is hoped that the development in West Cheltenham will build in energy efficiency from the start rather than needing to retro-fit in the future.

Summing up, the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency welcomed the assurance that Planning Committee was working to ensure that developers live up to the council's aspirations, and agreed that the SPD is a useful tool for heritage and conservation applications. She said she would be happy to meet with the Lido Trust to discuss solutions to their future energy bills, and confirmed that a lot of partnership work across the Cabinet is taking place to solve the problems which will arise for residents when the energy cap comes to an end.

The Mayor moved to the vote where Members voted unanimously in support of the recommendations as follows:

1. to approve the Heating and Energy Policy included in Appendix 2;

- 2. to delegate to the Director of Climate Change, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Assets (Deputy s151 Officer), responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Policy.**

10. ANNUAL REPORT ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Councillor Payne said that he was pleased to present the report, but made it clear that it was mostly the work of the former Chair, Chris Mason, who changed the face of Overview and Scrutiny, in particular in how reports were presented, limiting reports to one page and presentations to 10 minutes to allow Members more time to discuss and challenge. The list of areas under scrutiny is wide-ranging, and the vast majority of those invited to the meetings are pleased to share what they are doing, with one or two exceptions in the past – in particular the NHS and former Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). He was happy to report that the new PCC attended a recent meeting, spoke openly and at length, and was happy to answer all Members' questions. He had no hesitation in recommending the report to Members, and continued use of Overview and Scrutiny to challenge elements that need to be challenged. Members can be confident that the committee can continue to do this, working in a constructive and supportive way for all people.

A Member thanked Councillor Payne and his predecessor for their excellent work, but asked whether the committee could take another look at healthcare provision, in view of the recent CQC report. She realised this should be a matter for the county Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), but felt that if CBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee were able to look at the report in relation to what is happening in Cheltenham, it could be useful and potentially match or supersede the HOSC report.

A Member said that he would be attending a joint meeting of the county HOSC and Adult Social Care Committee the following day, which would be considering the CQC report. He added that representatives of the NHS Trust had attended Overview and Scrutiny in the past, which had been very constructive.

Councillor Payne agreed that the CQC report made very poor reading; Cheltenham should not accept the appallingly poor healthcare provision and lack of access to services – this was highlighted on the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on deprivation. He said he would be happy to invite local or Gloucestershire NHS managers to Overview and Scrutiny to justify what they are doing.

The Leader thanked Councillor Payne for the report and for the excellent work of Overview and Scrutiny, and also for chairing the committee. A Member who is currently chairing one of the task groups also wanted to add thanks to the unnamed officers for all their input, and Democratic Services for making the meetings run.

Councillor Payne thanked Members for their comments, and agreed that the level of support for committees provided by officers and Democratic Services was outstanding – he offered sincere thanks to them, and to current and previous Members of Overview and Scrutiny for all the work they do.

The Mayor moved to the vote, where Members voted unanimously in support of the recommendation:

- 1. that the Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny 2021-22 is noted.**

11. NOTICES OF MOTION (A)

Motion A: Supporting Proportional Representation for UK General Elections

Proposed by Councillor Baker, seconded by Councillor Wilkinson

This Council notes that:

The First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system originated when land-owning aristocrats dominated parliament and voting was restricted to property-owning men.

In Europe, only the UK and authoritarian Belarus still use the archaic, single-round FPTP system for general elections while Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect parliaments in more than 80 countries. Those countries tend to be more equal, freer and greener.

PR ensures that all votes count, have equal value, and that seats won match the votes cast. Under PR, MPs and Parliaments better reflect the age, gender and protected characteristics of local communities and the nation.

MPs better reflecting their communities leads to improved decision-making, wider participation, and increasing levels of ownership of decisions taken.

PR would also end minority rule. In 2019 43.6% of the vote provided one party with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. PR also prevents 'wrong winner' elections such as occurred in 1951 and February 1974.

PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and should be extended to elections to the Westminster Parliament.

Council therefore resolves to request that the Chief Executive writes to the relevant minister in the Cabinet Office urging the bringing forward of legislation to enable Proportional Representation to be used for general elections.

Councillor Baker was delighted to propose the motion, which proposed rejection of the archaic and unrepresentative first-past-the-post system, and adoption of

proportional representation instead. This is a longstanding aim of the Liberal Democrats and Green Party, supported at the recent Labour Party Conference, and also with a small number of advocates in the Conservative party. He said that the UK is almost alone in Europe in continuing with this system – the others being Belarus and France – and it leads to millions of wasted votes, with some parties completely under-represented and others grossly over-represented.

He told Members that in the 2019 general election, the Conservatives received 43.6% of the votes yet were rewarded with 56% of MPs, forming a majority government despite having failed to persuade 50.1% of the electorate to vote for them. Labour won 32% of the votes and 31% of MPs, Liberal Democrats 11.5% of the votes and 1.7% of MPs, the Green Party 2.7% of the vote and 0.7% (1) MP, and Brexit 2% of the vote and no MPs. The FPTP system doesn't deliver representative government; it is not fair or representative or democratic. There are several types of PR system, but whichever one is used, he said it would result in a government that reflects the wishes of the majority, and doesn't waste millions of vote for UKIP, Brexit, the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats, Labour voters in the south and Conservative voters in the north. In 2019 it took 38k votes to elect a Tory, 50k to elect a Labour candidate, 334k to elect a Liberal Democrat, and 864k to elect a Green Party MP.

He noted that it is argued that PR doesn't return constituency MPs, but said this depends on the system chosen – the mixed member PR system in Germany and the Scottish and Welsh assemblies keeps local MPs, people are properly represented and have access to their MP. It is also said that coalition governments are weak and indecisive, but many European countries have shown that coalition governments can be effective, successful and representative, truly reflecting the values of the majority of the people.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Wilkinson pointed out that the single best argument for the FPTP system – strong government, consistent leadership, clarity of purpose – was clearly not working out at present. The system freezes out minority voices, and can never be successful – there has been no single party government with the support of more than 50% of voters in anyone's memory. The Labour landslide in 1997 was won with 43% of the vote, the Conservative landslide in 2019 with 43% of the vote, yet they lost their majority in 2017 with 42% of the vote – this doesn't give clear outcomes, reflecting the will of the electorate.

He reminded Members that the only other place in Europe using a FPTP system in Belarus – not a favourable comparison – which is why it is important to support the Councils for PR campaign. He recently spoke at its cross-party panel launch, alongside Green Party, Labour and Independent representatives. He said PR is not about stopping certain people from getting power, but ensuring that all votes count equally and that everyone has the chance to impact the outcome of an election. This applies equally to Conservative voters in Liverpool, Labour voters in Cheltenham, Green Party voters anywhere outside Brighton, and Reform UK (Brexit) or UKIP voters just about anywhere. It isn't the liberal way to revel in their opponents' voices being quashed, but without change we will continue to have dysfunctional governments that serve nobody. He therefore urged Members to back this worthy and just campaign.

The Conservative group leader said his group would not be voting in support of the motion, though noted that it only referred to general elections and, ironically, there would be a lot more Conservative Members if PR had been used at the last local election. He reminded Members that as part of the Liberal Democrats' coalition deal in 2011, a referendum on the alternative voting system was held – it was rejected by 66% and cost £75m. The Brexit referendum cost £150m, and apart from the cost, he did not think a referendum on PR would be a priority for British people at the moment. He felt that encouraging more people to be involved and vote was the best way forward.

Councillor Flynn said she supported the motion, as PR ensures every vote counts and is of equal value and seats won match votes cast. She said that under PR, MPs and parliaments better reflect voters and communities, leading to improved decision-making, wider participation, and increased levels of ownership of decisions. It would also end minority rule, as demonstrated by the average results of the last two CBC elections, where the party with 49% of the votes were rewarded with 70% of the seats and 100% of the power. She said this demonstrated that local elections were unfair, undemocratic and did not reflect voters' views, and pointed out that Northern Ireland had used PR for local elections since 1973 and Scotland since 2007.

She proposed an amendment to the motion to include local elections, with the additional of 'and local' between 'general' and 'elections':

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Joy. She told Members that she first voted at a general election in 2010, and as councillor for St Paul's ward had now come full circle in seeing how people interact and engage with democracy. She said everyone in the room knew the value of local democracy, how vital it was to ensure people engaged, and it was superfluous to say there was a difference between general and local elections – if people can have a real say in what is happening locally, their faith in the electoral system will be rewarded, and they are more likely to engage. Many local regions in European countries work well without one strong figure in charge, and local government should be a microcosm, part of a strong eco-system of participation.

Councillor Baker was supportive of Councillor Flynn's comments, but said the motion was part of a national campaign for general elections, being proposed by councils up and down the country. He would therefore prefer to stick with the motion as given.

A Member wondered how the proposed motion would affect Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, if it is a UK-wide campaign, and already use PR in their national elections.

Councillor Flynn said she was struggling to understand why the insertion of two words – 'and local' – was unacceptable to Councillor Baker. The Fair Votes in Local Government campaign is a campaign of the Electoral Reform Society. She wondered if his reluctance to adopt her amendment had anything to do with the fact that it would result in the Liberal Democrats losing control of Cheltenham Borough Council. She repeated that PR in local elections would be fairer and give local people more of a say and be properly represented.

With no more debate, the Mayor invited Members to vote on Councillor Flynn's amendment to the motion:

Council therefore resolves to request that the Chief Executive writes to the relevant minister in the Cabinet Office urging the bringing forward of legislation to enable Proportional Representation to be used for general and local elections.

The vote was as follows:

4 in support, 25 in objection, 6 abstentions

The motion was not carried.

In debating the substantive motion, Members made the following points:

- the 2010 election, which resulted in the coalition government, was a good demonstration of why the first-past-the-post system didn't work for everyone. It should also be noted that France actually uses two-stage voting which knocks out the candidates with the least votes, and is not the best system. Proportional representation best reflects the results in the vote;
- the general election was a good place to start in the push towards PR, though it would also be welcome in local elections, resulting in broader representation across the council and encouraging more people to vote. This is a long-held Liberal Democrat goal;
- knocking on doors, it is clear that people are more likely to vote if they can feel confident that their votes will count;
- it is clear that the system needs to change, as demonstrated by the results of the 2019 general election. People don't vote because they cannot see the point – in areas with a majority of a particular age or income bracket, many people will not bother voting as they feel their voices will not be heard;
- we need a voting system which gives everyone a fair vote that counts, that encourages people to vote, and means that we get the government we want and deserve rather than one which the system imposes on us.

In summing up, Councillor Baker thanked Members for their support. He said a fairer voting system may not be top priority at the moment, but it is fundamental that we have a government that reflects the wishes of the people, and it is really important to bring the UK up to speed with other European countries. He reiterated that this was a national campaign, shared by councils up and down the country in the format presented today, and therefore not appropriate for it to be amended.

The Mayor then moved to the vote, where Members voted as follows:

31 in support

4 against

0 abstentions

MOTION CARRIED

12. NOTICES OF MOTION (B)
Motion B

Proposed by Councillor Joy; seconded by Councillor Flynn

Council notes that:

- **Severn Wye Energy Agency estimates around 14,000 Cheltenham households could experience fuel poverty this year.**
- **Cold homes and fuel poverty contribute to the phenomenon of excess winter deaths. England saw an estimated 63,000 excess winter deaths in 2020-21, 10% of which have been directly attributed to fuel poverty. (Institute of Health Equity).**
- **CBC is working with organisations including Vision 21, Severn Wye Energy Agency, Planet Cheltenham and Cheltenham Zero to alleviate fuel poverty, but acknowledges that the work currently planned will not be enough to prevent serious hardship and exacerbate health inequalities, especially in the immediate future.**
- **According to FOfE, 57% of homes in Cheltenham are rated EPC D to G, and as such are not sufficiently energy-efficient. Around 9,300 homes across Cheltenham would benefit significantly from free loft insulation, and around 9,800 would benefit from free cavity wall insulation. The government recommends that all homes be EPC C or above by 2035. To achieve that target, at least 3,621 homes need to be insulated per year to avoid unnecessary cold and financial hardship.**
- **A great deal of housing stock is heritage and privately-rented, with property managers failing to upgrade them to prevent damp, mould, heat loss and electrical faults.**
- **This Council declared a ‘Cost of Living Emergency’ in July 2022, and following from the declaration of a ‘Climate Emergency’ in 2019, must aim to end fuel poverty in the area by 2030, in a way that also reduces domestic energy use and helps meet climate commitments.**

This Council resolves to:

- 1. Enforce existing regulations on energy efficiency and property standards, particularly in the private rented sector.**
- 2. Aim to maximise the incomes of low-income households through the efficient delivery of Council-administered benefits, a sensitive approach to debt recovery and the provision of accessible advice and support through a wide range of channels.**
- 3. Create support systems for private renters to ensure their housing rights are being fulfilled.**
- 4. Publish a statement of intent and set locally appropriate eligibility criteria to access Energy Company Obligation funding via the Local Authority Flexibility arrangements.**
- 5. Take immediate-impact measures to assess and improve the energy efficiency of Cheltenham Borough Homes housing stock.**

Further, Council requests that officers:

- **Report on progress made on ending fuel poverty to the Overview and Scrutiny committee every six months.**
- **Sign Cheltenham Borough Council up to the End Fuel Poverty Coalition.**

Council also requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the HM Treasury asking for funding to upgrade homes.

In proposing the motion, Cllr. Joy suggested that it could tie in with the Heating and Energy Policy agreed earlier in the meeting. She was conscious that Council would not meet again until December, and felt obligated to ensure that this important topic was brought to Members' attention. They had a real opportunity to investigate fuel poverty and make a difference for the many households across Cheltenham suffering from it.

She highlighted a number of key issues that contributed to fuel poverty, in addition to the current geopolitical instability. Many energy users were unaware they could switch suppliers and those who did had difficulty doing so, while HMO residents were not in a position to retrofit their living spaces. Elderly residents in particular were less likely to have a bank account or trust Direct Debit, which energy suppliers tended to prefer. It was clear that residents with complex needs were struggling, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation finding that 30% of disabled people lived in fuel poverty – a figure they expected to substantially rise in the coming months.

While the council's Heating and Energy Policy was a proactive step, extra elements and more urgent action were needed in order to help prevent the 7,000 deaths directly attributed to fuel poverty each year. In the last month, there had been a house fire in her ward caused by someone burning candles for heat, and she was not convinced that landlords were following proper fire safety standards.

She noted that point 3 of her motion (to create support systems for private renters to ensure their housing rights were being fulfilled) was something the council was already empowered to do, following its implementation of a rent repayment order in 2018. The other steps she suggested were practical and actionable, such as signing up to the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, which would cost only £250 a year and form a key part of a comprehensive support network. She added that it was essential to support hardworking and often underfunded organisations across the town. In summary, she asked Council to consider the suggestions made and use all the tools in its arsenal to deal with the situation before it became even more desperate and extreme.

Amendment to Motion B

Proposed by Councillor Jeffries; seconded by Councillor Lewis

Council notes that:

- Severn Wye Energy Agency estimates around 14,000 Cheltenham households could experience fuel poverty this year.
- Cold homes and fuel poverty contribute to the phenomenon of excess winter deaths. England saw an estimated 63,000 excess winter deaths in 2020-21, 10% of which have been directly attributed to fuel poverty. (Institute of Health Equity).
- CBC is working with organisations including Vision 21, Severn Wye Energy Agency, Planet Cheltenham and Cheltenham Zero to alleviate fuel poverty, but acknowledges that the work currently planned will not be enough to prevent serious hardship and exacerbate health inequalities, especially in the immediate future.
- According to FOfE, 57% of homes in Cheltenham are rated EPC D to G, and as such are not sufficiently energy-efficient. Around 9,300 homes across Cheltenham would benefit significantly from free loft insulation, and around 9,800 would benefit from free cavity wall insulation. The government recommends that all homes be EPC C or above by 2035. To achieve that target, at least 3,621 homes need to be insulated per year to avoid unnecessary cold and financial hardship.
- A great deal of housing stock is heritage and privately rented, with property managers failing to upgrade them to prevent damp, mould, heat loss and electrical faults.
- This Council declared a 'Cost of Living Emergency' in July 2022, and following from the declaration of a 'Climate Emergency' in 2019, must aim to end fuel poverty in the area by 2030, in a way that also reduces domestic energy use and helps meet climate commitments.

Council recognises the hard work and dedication of its Councillors, officers, and partner organisations in their ongoing work to tackle poverty of all kinds across Cheltenham.

This work includes, but is not limited to:

- The Warm & Well Scheme in partnership with Severn Wye, which provides access to advice and grants to tackle fuel poverty
- The Award Winning No Child Left Behind scheme, which is supporting the #FeedCheltenham and #WarmCheltenham schemes.
- Cheltenham Borough Council's recent foodbank grants
- Cheltenham Borough Council's super-fast rollout of recent support grants from the Government.
- CBH's tenant support packages, which cover housing rights, benefits access, and debt advice.
- CBH's focus on improving the energy efficiency of poorer performing homes.
- Investment in improving energy efficiency in council homes via the Decarbonisation Fund
- Homelessness prevention work via the Housing Options Service

- **Partnership working with Citizens Advice providing housing rights advice, which includes private renters**
- **The Private Sector Housing team inspecting and raising housing standards in homes across Cheltenham**
- **The Council tax support scheme that provides maximum support to our most vulnerable residents.**

In acknowledging this work, Council remains ever dedicated to finding new ways to help the people of Cheltenham at this time of crisis. A crisis created, first and foremost, by the negligence of this Westminster Government.

As such, Council resolves that the O&S Committee be requested to review the issues raised in relation to fuel poverty, alongside its ongoing work reviewing our support for deprived areas and prepare a report on potential next steps for Cabinet's consideration. This report should be considered within the bounds of our budgetary position and the powers this authority and our partners hold.

In proposing an amendment to the motion, Cllr. Jeffries noted the debilitating effects of all types of poverty on physical and mental health. The true measure of any society was found in how it treated its most vulnerable members, and some 14.5 million people were living in poverty in the UK – more than one in five. Of these, 8.1 million were working-age adults, 4.3 million were children and 2.1 million were pensioners. The Resolution Foundation predicted that 1.3 million more people would be plunged into absolute poverty by 2023, including 500,000 children. The NEA estimated that 6.5 million households were in fuel poverty in the UK, and this was expected to grow by another 2 million. There would be deaths this winter as a result of the fuel crisis.

He asked who could make the biggest impact in changing the lives of those in the figures he had just cited, and suggested that central government was not acting in the interests of its most vulnerable citizens. Poverty had risen as a result of austerity, before the government had to be shamed by a famous footballer into feeding hungry children during the pandemic. Recent political chaos and the change of Prime Minister had done nothing to improve the situation for vulnerable people or alleviate poverty.

In contrast to this, the council continued to expand the measures it put in place to support the most vulnerable residents – both in terms of its statutory functions and in partnership with a wide range of organisations. One of these measures which was not mentioned in the amendment was the 'Donate the Rebate' campaign, which sought to encourage those who did not need their £400 energy rebate from the government to donate it to those who did. The amendment requested that O&S review the issues raised, and he was sure the committee would take a measured view.

In seconding the amendment, Cllr. Lewis emphasised the vital work undergone by the council and its partners and officers, which was both the backbone of the town and the justification for the council's existence. In addition to the measures outlined in the amendment, she assured the proposer of the original motion that they were working to protect families in HMOs, those who had not received a

rebate and those who could not change their energy suppliers. The work the council did was impressive given its limited remit and resources, and they were constrained above all else by the outrageous mismanagement of local government finances by central government. She thanked those working round the clock in Cheltenham to support the most vulnerable, and looked forward to seeing what O&S produced as a result of this request.

The Mayor moved into the debate, where Members made the following points:

- it was important to find out exactly what the council's powers were here, so it would have been useful to refer the original motion to O&S to find this out;
- the council had a very sound reputation for the administration of both council tax and benefits, but the next few months would be difficult for everyone, and it was an issue far wider than just Cheltenham or the UK;
- the council was already doing most of what was requested in the original motion, and going above and beyond in many ways;
- the original motion was timely but could have left someone with the impression that not much was happening, especially with regard to the private rented sector;
- council officers were working hard to hold private landlords to account and prosecute those who broke the law;
- Cllr. Joy's concerns about fire safety as a consequence of the fuel crisis were quite right. Residents were using candles and burning wood to provide heat and light, with significant health risks clearly involved, as well as increased risk for firefighters;
- close collaboration with county council colleagues would be necessary, especially on the question of fire safety;
- public information campaigns on topics like fire safety needed to reach all properties, not just those directly overseen by the council or CBH;
- the council was committed to delivering sustainable and energy efficient social housing across the town, with a particular focus on upgrading windows and doors;
- the council had previously applied to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund and was in the process of bidding for Phase 2;
- urgent action was needed with winter approaching and residents in a dire situation. It was essential that the issue was not kicked into the long grass, and an O&S response could take some time.

There being no further comments, the Mayor moved to the vote on the amendment, which was carried.

The Mayor then moved to the vote on the amended motion, which was carried.

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

There was none.

Sandra Holliday
Chairman