

Cheltenham Borough Council

Council

Minutes

Meeting date: 24 July 2023

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 5.00 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Matt Babbage (Chair), Paul Baker (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Ian Bassett-Smith, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Sandra Holliday, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Diggory Seacome, Julian Tooke, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Executive Director of Finance, Assets and Regeneration), Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Sarah Farooqi (One Legal), Martin Chastney (Senior Development Manager, Place & Economic Development) and Louis Krog (Head of Public Protection and DEPLO)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Atherstone, Chidley, Joy, Sankey, Tailford and Wheeler.

2 Declarations of interest

Four Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 12, Councillor Beale's motion:

- Councillor Babbage is a governor of the Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust and will therefore hand over to the Deputy Mayor to chair this item;
- Councillor Boyes's husband and Councillor Harvey's daughter work for Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust;

- Councillor Bamford drives a van for the GHNHS Trust once a week.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June were approved and signed accordingly as a true record.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor did not have any announcements to make on this occasion.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader shared the following updates:

- at this year's Local Government Conference, CBC, together with Cynam, Stroud High School and Sopra Steria hosted a well-received and well-attended session to showcase their work to promote and educate young women in the cyber-digital world;
- as part of our commitment to combatting climate change, CBC has provided £10k funding to Planet Cheltenham, towards the installation of green energy equipment for a new community space in one of our less affluent wards;
- at July Cabinet, the first CIL neighbourhood fund was approved, providing £128k for 16 projects across the unparished areas of the borough; thanks to the cross-party panel for their work on this;
- as part of Black History Month, together with our partners, CARE, children from across the borough were invited to write or draw a piece about living in Cheltenham. The winning entries will be heard at the Literature Festival, hopefully with two actors assisting with performances and beginning a discussion with the young people;
- thanks to officers in the public protection team for a fantastic job dealing with the recent influx of travellers in a swift, highly-professional and effective manner;
- Members are encouraged to respond to the consultation on the proposed closure of Cheltenham's rail ticket office;
- thanks to the LGA team who conducted a corporate peer review last week, and to all the officers and partners who contributed. The report will be shared with Members when it is received, but the overall message is that CBC is well regarded by stakeholders and partners, and has highly-qualified officers and members with a clear sense of purpose;
- thanks to Steve Mawson for working with CBC, and good luck to him in his new post as CEO of Kirklees Council;
- congratulations and good luck to Darren Knight, who will leave CBC in September to take up a new role as Deputy CEO of Warwick District Council; thanks for his energy, commitment and tenacity to get results for any task he is asked to undertake;
- after more than 35 years of service to the council and Cheltenham residents, Mike Redman has decided to move on to pastures new. Thanks to him for all his hard work.

6 To receive petitions

None had been received.

7 Public Questions

There were none.

8 Member Questions

Four Member questions had been received.

1. Question from Councillor Julian Tooke to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

It has been suggested in the press, on the strength of a comment of a member of this council, that Cheltenham might lose its 'spa status' because the Pittville Pump Room waters are not drinkable at present. Please can the cabinet member confirm whether it is possible for a settlement to 'lose spa status' and whether that is a risk to this town. As the member for Pittville where the Pump Room is located, my concern is that these rumours and the associated negative publicity is to the detriment of the town's brand image and massively important tourism sector.

Response from Cabinet Member

I was surprised to read the media coverage about the 'risk' that Cheltenham might 'lose its spa town status'. The initial report seems to have been written on the strength of speculation to the press by a member of this council. I'm sure that all of us consider our duties as members before we pass comment and that the member in question did not intend to cause difficulties for the town or needless alarm to local residents.

Officers have investigated this matter and I have personally taken part in the information-gathering activities. This Council is not aware of any process, committee or organisation that could take away Cheltenham's 'spa town status'. We have checked this with Historic England, which confirmed our view. I am therefore happy to reassure Cllr Tooke, all members of this council and local residents that Cheltenham cannot lose its 'spa town status'. As part of my investigations, I recently visited Harrogate, which was a spa town long before Cheltenham. Harrogate's Spa water has not been available to drink since 2012 due to safety issues. Harrogate is still

marketed as a spa town. I have appended pictures for members.





Following other questions from local residents and members of this council, I have asked officers whether the source from which the Pump Room water is drawn, is contaminated as a result of the well-publicised national sewage dumping scandal. This scandal has included raw sewage being allowed to flow into the Hatherley Brook and River Chelt. It is my understanding that sewage dumping in rivers is unlikely to be the cause of the contamination of the spa water under the Pittville Pump Room.

Work is on-going to address the safety issues with Cheltenham's water and members will receive an update in due course. In the meantime, I would urge all members to seek advice from officers of this council before engaging in speculation which might harm this town's tourism industry and the very many hospitality businesses that benefit from tourism spend.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tooke

It is good to hear that Cheltenham won't lose its spa status, but disappointing that this rumour spread across the media and could have undermined tourism and businesses. What steps can the council take to counteract irresponsible rumour mongering?

Response from Cabinet Member

The original response demonstrates that a town will not lose its spa status simply because its waters cannot be consumed, but it is important that councillors are measured in their statements, particularly to outside media, to ensure tourism and hospitality continue to thrive. In this case, the Member who made the original comments did so with the best of intentions.

2. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

I was recently in Bath and was impressed by their efforts to combat urban gulls which upset many residents in Cheltenham.

One practical measure that they have adopted is to install "Belly Bins" which can be opened to dispose of waste and then closed, preventing the gulls from getting at the contents of bin. The bins were in the city and in the conservation area.

Will the cabinet member examine the feasibility of installing such bins in Cheltenham possibly in a phased programme to ease cost?

Response from Cabinet Member

I'd like to thank Cllr Harman for his question. A number of bin trials are currently underway to assess the effectiveness of various designs.

Cllr Harman rightfully highlights that Big Belly bins have been deployed in various urban locations across the country. The bins are not always installed to combat urban gulls but rather they are mostly deployed in high footfall areas where traditional high street bins fill up quickly. It is reported that Big Belly bins can hold up to 8 times the waste of a normal bin due to the fact that they contain compaction mechanisms to compress the waste. The bins use solar panels and are connected to wifi to send a message to street teams to indicate when they need to be emptied. This has the potential to create efficiencies for street cleansing teams who have to empty the bins less often. Due to these features these types of bins can be 5-10 times more expensive (costing thousands per unit) than a regular high street bin.

In some areas these bins have also prompted some negative feedback from users claiming that the technology/compaction can fail and they are unhygienic to use due to the fact that the user has to touch and open the handle of the bin to use it. This has resulted in some user's merely depositing waste on the top or to the side of the bin – which can risk exacerbating any issues with litter and potentially leave more food waste available for urban gulls. In addition, as the bins are more complex, this can mean they are more complicated and costly to fix if things do go wrong.

This Council, in partnership with Ubico, continue to work hard to look at ways of improving the service and this will always include reviewing our street bins particularly when they are due for replacement. As the responsible cabinet member, I have over the past year taken a particular interest in the design of waste bins, from Uppsala to Ullswater and I will be inputting my own views into our bin replacement review to ensure we have the right bins to meet our needs.

We will continue to consider modern or newer technology, such as big belly bins, but as set out above, decisions on what product to go with and what is best and most effective for Cheltenham requires consideration of a number of factors and trying to make comparisons with other localities is not always a good indicator of how a product will perform in Cheltenham. It is only by trialling a product that we can truly test and assess performance. This is something that the Council will keep under review and if an opportunity arises to trial a big belly bin in a cost effective way then the council will be happy to consider it.

Supplementary question from Councillor Harman

Thanks to the Cabinet Member for this response, and it is good that CBC is looking at ways to combat the gull menace. Will he consider the addition of 'feed the bins, not the gulls' signs or stickers on the bins, as is common practice elsewhere, including Bath.

Response from Cabinet Member

I can certainly look into that, and also at the underground bins which are common in Europe and also in some parts of the UK. These are enormous, efficient, and

minimise the need for multiple recycling bins and bags. We continue to look at better bins and technical opportunities for waste management in Cheltenham.

3. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

I understand that residents, certainly in Charlton Kings, received notification through their doors on July 4th that they need to sort recycling even more. They will now have up to 6 different containers to put out on alternate Thursdays (Blue bag, green boxes x 3, food recycling and brown garden waste brown bin!).

I know many residents have limited storage space for the various recycling containers and already find it difficult to manage their current number of boxes/bins.

Ubico used to collect green and brown bins in the same week which made things easier but that changed so they are alternate weeks, and the garden recycling is the same week as the rest of the recycling - hence 6 containers!

Is this a trial or is it applicable across the town?

Response from Cabinet Member

I'd like to thank Cllr Nelson for the question. I can confirm that this is not a trial. An information leaflet was sent to residents to remind them of the bank holiday collections, opening hours for the Household Recycling Centre (HRC) and providing useful recycling tips. Residents have been asked where possible to keep our crews safe from any broken glass and if they have the space available, to use an extra box, one for paper and one for glass. If not, they can continue to separate glass and paper within one box, with paper on the bottom, as crews do need to have visibility of any glass that is broken.

With regard to how we operate waste and recycling collections in partnership with Ubico, we plan all of our vehicles rounds and crews in the most efficient way we can to minimise the cost to the taxpayer. And by planning efficient collection rounds we keep carbon emissions and fuel usage also to a minimum.

We ask residents to sort their recycling because this also has a big impact on the overall service. If the recyclate is sorted well, this can reduce the time it takes to collect. Reducing the collection time for each property by only a few seconds can save a lot of time when this is multiplied across 1000s of collections per day. Reducing collection time also helps to reduce vehicle idling, which reduces fuel use, emissions, is more beneficial for air quality and helps reduce costs. The shorter the idling time of vehicles also helps to keep traffic moving. Separating recyclate also improves the quality of what is collected which helps it to be more attractive to the onward market.

With specific regard to Garden Waste, this is a paid for service and, again, by keeping the service as efficient as possible we ensure that we are reducing the impact of vehicles and are not passing these costs back to the customer.

While we understand that, for some residents, having a number of receptacles does put pressure on space this has to be balanced against the most cost effective way of collecting waste and recycling that keeps any environmental impact to a minimum.

Supplementary question from Councillor Nelson

I received one of these leaflets through my door this morning, and note that it states one box should be used for glass and another for paper, contrary to the Cabinet Member's response that one box can be used for both. How can we let residents know this?

Response from Cabinet Member

Efforts were made to keep the leaflet as simple and clear as possible, and the reason for separating different items into different bins is to reduce collection time and the need for re-separation at the household recycling centre, and to improve the quality of recyclates – the council is penalised if one type of recyclate is polluted by another. We would prefer people to keep them separate, but in some circumstances they can be mixed. This may need to be made clearer but could lead to confusion. I will speak about it to the Head of Recycling.

4. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

There are currently several job vacancies for positions within CBC, some at a fairly senior level. For example, those recently advertised on CBC Facebook:-

19 & 29 June - Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance and Head of Policy and Place-making

20 June - Revenues and Benefits Apprentice

21 June - Construction Project Manager and Commercial Manager

19 May – HR Coordinator, Community Safety Apprentice, Park Ranger Apprentice, Finance Apprentice, Estates Surveyor, Environmental Health Officer (Food Safety), Visitor Welcome Assistant

I appreciate some of these may now have been filled.

How many vacancies are there currently across CBC, what are the positions and what are the terms (hours & pay) please?

Response from the Leader

Thank you for your questions and please find below an update on the vacancies you have highlighted:

Head of Development Management, Enforcement & Compliance & Head of Policy & Placemaking – these roles have been short-listed and the interviewing process is currently underway.

Apprentices: Assessment day and interviews for our Finance Apprentice, Revenues & Benefits Apprentice and Park Ranger Apprentice will be taking place during w/c 24th July. We have filled the Community & ASB Apprentice role.

Construction Project Manager and Commercial Manager – these have been short-listed and interviews are currently taking place.

We have filled the HR Co-ordinator, Estates Surveyor, Environmental Health Officer (Food Safety) & Visitor Welcome Assistant vacancies.

We currently have one vacancy to be advertised for a full-time Finance HRBP, at an annual salary of between £44,012 - £49,332, a vacancy in our Revenues & Benefits team and one in our Customer Services team. There are other vacancies within our establishment but with our organisational phase 2 taking place, these are currently under review. Full terms and conditions for our roles are set out in the advert and are also available from our website.

- Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).
- 25 days rising to 30 days after five years.
- A flexible and agile working environment - opportunities to work from home or elsewhere and flexibility in working hours.
- Two days paid time off for volunteering.
- An employee assistance programme
- A cycle to work scheme.
- Low cost town centre parking.
- A commitment to employee wellbeing.

9 Housing Benefit War Pensions Disregard Policy

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report and policy, one of the shortest he has ever seen but brought to Council because the policy is significant. Its purpose is to reconfirm that war disablement and war widow/widower's pensions should be disregarded as income when calculating entitlement to housing benefit and would be the right thing to do. He commended the report to Council.

There were no questions; one Member commented that he fully supported this excellent scheme.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT:

- 1. the Housing Benefit War Pensions Disregard Policy in appendix 2 to confirm that war pensions should continue to be fully disregarded in the calculation of Housing Benefit is approved'**

2. **decisions relating to the application of these income disregards are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and officers in the Revenues and Benefits team**

10 Financial Outturn Report 2022-23

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets presented the outturn report which showed the actual income and expenditure in the year against the revised budget figures approved by Council in February. He said the past 12 months have been an economic rollercoaster, resulting in significant financial pressures, with inflation increasing from 5.1% to over 11% (now around 7.9%), ten interest rate increases, and energy prices tripled since the original 2022-23 budget was approved. These challenges have placed huge pressure on our costs and resources; the revised budget included the increased costs, and Council approved use of general balances to balance the budget, possible because of a sizeable legal settlement received by the council in May 2022. The actual outturn positions reports that £2.606m of general balances was required rather than the £2.505m budgeted which represents a £101,000 overspend against the revised budget.

He said we must continue to be vigilant throughout 2023/24 as general balances are finite and we cannot continue to rely on these year after year to balance our budget. The outturn report reflects the importance of strengthening our reserves to bring our general balance levels to the optimum level, as recommended by our Section 151 Officer, and therefore moved the recommendations as laid out in the report.

There were no questions or debate on this item.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets thanked officers of the finance and assets team for their very hard work behind the scenes, and commended the report.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **the financial outturn performance position for the General Fund is received, and Council notes that in delivering services in 2022/23, after the application of carry forward requests and following the use earmarked reserves, there was an overspend of £101,294 against the 2022/23 revised budget approved by Council on 20 February 2023;**
2. **£859,147 of carry forward approved by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers at Appendix 5 is noted, and £72,000 of carry forward requests which require Member approval is approved;**
3. **the annual treasury management report at Appendix 7 and the actual 2022/23 prudential and treasury indicators are noted;**
4. **the capital programme outturn position as detailed in Section 7 of this report and Appendix 8 is noted, and the carry forward of unspent**

budgets into 2022/23 and the inclusion of two new projects in the 2023/24 capital programme with no additional funding commitment required from the Council is approved;

- 5. the year end position in respect of Section 106 agreements and partnership funding agreements at Appendix 9 is noted;**
- 6. the outturn position in respect of collection rates for council tax and non-domestic rates for 2022/23 in Appendix 10 is noted;**
- 7. the financial outturn performance position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2022/23 in Appendix 11 is received, and the carry forward of capital budgets from 2022/23 into 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 12 are approved.**

11 Disposal of Municipal Offices

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said the report sought Members' agreement to put the Municipal Offices up for sale - a hugely significant decision, as the council has been involved with this iconic building for over 100 years. The council's Strategic Asset Management Strategy reviews and monitors its properties to ensure they are delivering the best financial and strategic returns and delivering the best value for Cheltenham residents. The many changes in the size and shape of the council, and particularly hybrid working which was grown since the pandemic mean that our accommodation needs are no longer suited to this building.

This has presented a timely opportunity to consider the long-term purpose and uses of the Municipal Offices, to ensure it continues to play an active role in shaping a vibrant future for the town centre whilst enabling CBC to remain financially sustainable. Wide consultation across the town has been undertaken, with the views and opinions the Civic Society, Local History Society, Architects' Panel, Chamber of Commerce, BID, community sector representatives and representatives of youth groups, including CBC's apprentices, taken into account – these are summarised in the report. English Heritage is also keen to be involved.

He recognised that Members would have a range of valid views and opinions to share, and ended by summarising the recommendations of the report, including a commitment to bring a report to Council for a final decision on the future of this iconic building.

In response to Member questions, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and Executive Director for Finance, Assets and Regeneration confirmed that:

- there is currently no firm plan for where the council might move to when the time comes, with the focus currently on the disposal of the Municipal Offices. The council-owned Delta Place and Ellenborough House have been discussed, but it could be some time before future accommodation needs to be sought. Where it goes will depend on what is available at that time, and how the needs of the council may have changed;

- the Cumulative Annual Cash Flows by Option graph does not include the increases in the value of the asset with the investment of a full refurbishment; it models the cash flow impact rather than a balance sheet valuation of any additional investment;
- the value of the asset would increase at the point of investment, but a formal valuation for the Statement of Accounts 12 months later may very well decrease significantly. Local government finances don't allow for depreciation in absolute cash terms; any revaluation downwards would be treated in the accounts as an impairment loss but wouldn't have any impact on the council-tax payer.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- whilst recognising the need to make changes in the way the building operates, the report focuses on the sale but doesn't analyse options at this stage, which is not entirely satisfactory. Previous discussions over the last 50 years have concluded that the council needs to retain an interest in the building, needs a town-centre presence, needs the Council Chamber. There are still a lot of unanswered questions;
- it is important to remember that the Municipal Offices is a listed building;
- this matter has been under consideration for a long period of time;
- when thinking about alternative accommodation, it's important to note current uses and special functions of the building which might be difficult to replicate elsewhere, such as the A1 plotter for plans, archive requirements, and meeting spaces;
- noise insulation for any potential residential use in a town centre, in line with the agent of change principle, will be a challenge, but if a solution can be found with the planning department, this will be a positive advantage for residents of listed buildings and conservation areas across the town who face the same issue;
- officers are to be congratulated on the process they have gone through to reach this stage, particularly the engagement with important stakeholders. It has taken a long time, and is a massively exciting opportunity for the building to evolve and change again;
- selling the building is the right decision, rather than trying to adapt it to the council's changing needs. A new use could be life-changing for the town, and the council will be leading by example as owner of a fantastic building, in doing the right thing by the town and by its heritage. There are still some questions, but it will be good to get on with the development brief and see what opportunities come back;
- it is important to be flexible and consider all viable propositions. It seems likely that the building will move to some form of residential use, like Royal Crescent and Imperial Square. There may be some compromises, and it will be important to consider any development opportunities which could enhance the rear of the building, but it is important to get the best value for the people who elect us, and a scheme which isn't a loss for the town but an asset;
- the sequencing, vision, engagement-led discussions and brief laid out in the report are all commendable. Local Plan Policy MD3 flags the potential sale, and the time is clearly right for this, with the offices now too big for current needs -

the council needs somewhere more modern and flexible. There are massive planning protections to respect heritage assets and conservation areas, and although the Council Chamber is held in great affection by many, a space with multiple uses and better access will bring huge advantages;

- around the year 2000, there were 950 staff working out of the Municipal Offices, with the Trust, Ubico, and CBH; now there are about 200 staff, who occupy a maximum of 25% of the building, yet the council is custodian of the whole building. This is a great opportunity to put it back on the map, properly used and loved, and was highlighted in the peer review. Somewhere along the line we will need to consider where the council will relocate, but the primary issue is making the Municipal Offices work for the people of Cheltenham;
- it is difficult to understand the approach of taking options off the table unnecessarily and only consider selling the whole plot. With technology and hybrid working, selling part of it for residential but keeping some as offices would seem an option;
- there is also an element of civic pride in the Municipal Offices as the centre of Cheltenham's democracy which is not articulated in the report;
- with no alternative arrangement proposed, and no public consultation on the use of this central asset, the recommendations are difficult to support;
- although there was a long-held perception that the Municipal Offices were an important part of the town's democracy and must be protected by the council for future generations, the building has now served its purpose and we need to move on. It is important, however, that any future accommodation is located in the town centre, easily accessible for the people of Cheltenham;
- CBC made a commitment many years ago to retain the Municipal Offices, as belonging to the town and its residents, and it is disappointing that this commitment is to be abandoned with outright disposal, and that the council hasn't moved forward with its redevelopment before embarking on other projects. The building should remain in council ownership, whether or not the council remains in it;
- regarding the poor carbon footprint of the building and not achieving CBC's net zero goals by 2030, offloading the asset and making it someone else's problem isn't the same as offsetting.

Summing up, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets thanked Members for their views and opinions. He agreed that this is a tough decision, and that conversations have been going on for decades. The council has been open with residents, including a question about its future in the last residents' survey, and it is clear there are more questions than answers at present. It is clear, however, that the building is for the betterment of the town – solving how this can be achieved is the first priority, with conversations about a new home for the council to follow.

RESOLVED TO:

- 1. dispose of the Municipal Offices on the open market, in line with our agreed Asset Management Strategy, as the Municipal Offices are now surplus to our operational requirements;**

2. **commission a development brief for the Municipal Offices which will take a creative and conservation-led approach to the reuse, adaptation and extension of the listed building, its setting and the setting of neighbouring listed buildings and the conservation area;**
3. **on completion of the development brief, invite bids for development proposals for the Municipal Offices; and**
4. **request that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets bring back proposals to Full Council for a final decision on its future use and disposal.**

[27 in support, 7 in objection]

12 Notices of Motion

Councillor Baker, as Deputy Mayor, took the Chair for this agenda item.

Motion A

Proposed by: Councillor Graham Beale

Seconded by: Councillor Martin Horwood

Cheltenham Maternity Matters

This Council:

1. Notes with concern the current extended closure until at least October this year of Cheltenham's maternity unit, the Aveta Birth Centre, to be followed by a "further review";
2. Notes and welcomes the excellent reputation of the midwife-led centre and its community midwifery and ante-natal services, the central importance of choice for local mothers in the planning of local maternity services and agrees with the Royal College of Midwives that "placing women at the centre of their own care is crucial to improving pregnancy outcomes for both mother and baby";
3. Further notes and welcomes the finding of the 2016 Cumberlege report into better maternity outcomes that "women almost universally value local services" and that maternity services need to be "safer, more personalised, kinder, professional and more family friendly" and believes that smaller, local facilities like Aveta provide just such a service in a way that is inevitably harder in much larger, less personal units;
4. Notes that the stated reason for the extended closure is the increasing vacancy rate and difficulty in recruiting midwives, understands the pressures on the NHS not least in recruitment and retention following our separation from the EU and the government's mismanagement of workforce planning;
5. But recalls with concern that staffing issues were given as the reasons for the initial closure or downgrade of other services at Cheltenham General Hospital including the 24-hour Type 1 A&E service which has never been restored and the piecemeal loss of other services including our children's ward and general surgery which have never been reversed;

6. Welcomes the recent announcement of a £2.7m investment in maintaining a purpose-built birth unit and earnestly hopes that this investment is not at risk from the extended closure and uncertainty;

7. Remembers the huge public campaign, Cheltenham Maternity Matters, to save Cheltenham's maternity unit from proposed closure in 2006 which brought together MPs, this council, trades unions and royal colleges and local campaigners and reflected the huge support from local people for a friendly, local maternity service within quick and easy reach;

8. Invites the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities to communicate the contents of this motion to the chief executive of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and all members of the NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board, and to seek reassurance that the NHS remains unambiguously committed to a permanent maternity service at Cheltenham General Hospital.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Beale began by sharing the documented evidence that crash test dummies, for many years based on the average male body shape, had caused significantly more women than men to be seriously or fatally injured in car crashes, and once this was established, it took a further 20-30 years of research and testing to resolve. When becoming a father ten years ago, he realised how little support some women receive during and after childbirth. A traumatic birth can have a life-changing impact with nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety and depression, all of which can be reduced or reversed with timely intervention and support.

He said the Aveta Birthing Unit at Cheltenham General Hospital has for many years offered incredible support for many new parents, up to and after birth, yet sadly has been closed for over a year, with plans for re-opening delayed by staff shortages. The loss of this service has severely impacted Cheltenham families, and its permanent closure would be a tragic loss to women's birthing choices. Support for women and babies through childbirth is not only a critical service but a moral duty to set families up for success.

He ended by urging the Cabinet Member responsible to give a clear and permanent commitment to the Aveta Birthing Unit, and support the women and children of Cheltenham when they need it most.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Horwood said that in 2006, he was privileged as Cheltenham's MP to join with the NHS trade unions in a cross-party campaign to save Cheltenham's maternity unit when it was threatened with outright closure. Its success resulted in the outstanding Aveta service described by Councillor Beale.

He said the worry is that with the majority of Cheltenham's mums now giving birth elsewhere and the re-opening date drifting towards October and beyond, there is a

worry that the practical workforce and budgetary issues currently being discussed in relation to the birthing unit are the same as those used when Cheltenham lost its Type 1 A and E department, general surgery ward, Battledown children's ward and neonatal care unit.

He considered that the local NHS references to a 'further review' down the track is a real concern. Some of the reasons for this are known – government mismanagement of NHS workforce planning over the last decade, with many recruitment and retention issues which affect the whole NHS and are exacerbated by Brexit. It is important to put CBC's unambiguous commitment to the retention of the Aveta Unit, asking local NHS services to do all they can to protect its long-term future.

There is some reassurance that the NHS Trust has announced a £2.7m investment in maintaining the service, but if its closure continues, there is some risk to this investment or risk that it might be redirected to another site as part and parcel of a further review.

He said it was important to put the council's position on record, and hoped for unanimous support for this fantastic service for local mums and families.

In debate, many Members thanked Councillor Beale for this important motion and shared their experience of the wonderful service they received at the Aveta Birthing Unit and which families of Cheltenham deserved. The following points were made:

- it is a disgrace that mismanagement of workplace planning has led to this situation, but Gloucestershire is not alone – long-term solutions and plans are needed across the country;
- this crisis has been looming for over a decade, and now staff shortages – due to low pay rates and higher expectations - have resulted in the hospital trust having little choice other than to close local units and focus on Gloucester Royal. A change of government to one truly committed to the NHS is needed;
- it is good that this important motion has been proposed and seconded by male councillors, and hopefully the closure of this excellent unit will be reconsidered, as one hospital to cope with birth emergencies for the entire county is not acceptable. There is no guarantee that the £2.7m investment will come to Cheltenham, and it is clear from recent experience of hospital management in Gloucestershire that the only way to get what we want is fight for it;
- Cheltenham's population has grown over the years but its maternity service has not, and it is a scandal that there is currently no facility in a town of this size;
- whilst supporting the motion, it is a little bit woolly with no real conclusion. The council has a representative on the county Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and concerns could also be raised here;
- the issue is being over-politicised, and everyone should be working together to get the facility reopened, lobbying and inviting the new head of the NHS Trust in Gloucestershire to attend a CBC Overview and Scrutiny or GCC HOSC meeting;
- lifelong problems can arise if mothers and babies with post-natal complications cannot go back to the same maternity unit; closing units is a false economy in any case, as any difficulties will need to be referred to another hospital;

- the motion is comprehensive and well-researched, and although technology has helped reduce abnormalities and problems of pregnancy, maternity services are still in a regrettably poor state as demonstrated by the Cumberlege report, with 7% rated inadequate and 41% requiring improvement. There are many issues – Covid, industrial action, the financial crisis, Brexit – adversely impacting on NHS services and the quality of care;
- properly integrated teams are needed, and although Members are not in a position to change maternity care, the council should do all it can to encourage the GNHS Trust to encourage team building in maternity and other departments;
- everything that is wrong with NHS services is down to mismanagement, and Members who consider this to be politicising the issue are wrong. The government is trying to blame anything rather than taking responsibility, and has demonstrated a shocking dereliction of duty;
- taking the issue to the county HOSC has been suggested, but the county council is dominated by conservatives. Cheltenham Members represent the people of Cheltenham and must support the restoration of its maternity services and invite our HOSC representative to take CBC's concerns to the county. This isn't about politicising childbirth but about making our voices heard;
- this is a deeply political issue, resulting from 13 years' underfunding of the NHS. The Conservatives are responsible for the current NHS crisis, and the motion is a political statement;
- maternity services in Europe are far superior to those in the UK because of the way the government spends taxpayers' money – UK residents are not getting what they deserve, and Brexit has a lot to do with this.

The following 'friendly' amendment was proposed by Councillor Harman, to be added to the motion as proposed:

Proposed amendment

Proposer: Councillor Harman
Seconder: Councillor Nelson

Having been approved by CBC, the motion is referred to HOSC to receive reassurances about the future of the service.

The meeting adjourned for five minutes, for this to be considered.

On return, Councillor Beale thanked the Mayor and Members for a great debate, and for sharing their experiences and views. He was happy to accept the amendment, to achieve a unanimous approach on this issue.

RESOLVED THAT

This Council:

- 1. Notes with concern the current extended closure until at least October this year of Cheltenham's maternity unit, the Aveta Birth Centre, to be followed by a "further review";**
- 2. Notes and welcomes the excellent reputation of the midwife-led centre and its community midwifery and ante-natal services, the central importance of choice for local mothers in the planning of local maternity services and agrees with the Royal College of Midwives that "placing women at the centre of their own care is crucial to improving pregnancy outcomes for both mother and baby";**
- 3. Further notes and welcomes the finding of the 2016 Cumberlege report into better maternity outcomes that "women almost universally value local services" and that maternity services need to be "safer, more personalised, kinder, professional and more family friendly" and believes that smaller, local facilities like Aveta provide just such a service in a way that is inevitably harder in much larger, less personal units;**
- 4. Notes that the stated reason for the extended closure is the increasing vacancy rate and difficulty in recruiting midwives, understands the pressures on the NHS not least in recruitment and retention following our separation from the EU and the government's mismanagement of workforce planning;**
- 5. But recalls with concern that staffing issues were given as the reasons for the initial closure or downgrade of other services at Cheltenham General Hospital including the 24-hour Type 1 A&E service which has never been restored and the piecemeal loss of other services including our children's ward and general surgery which have never been reversed;**
- 6. Welcomes the recent announcement of a £2.7m investment in maintaining a purpose-built birth unit and earnestly hopes that this investment is not at risk from the extended closure and uncertainty;**
- 7. Remembers the huge public campaign, Cheltenham Maternity Matters, to save Cheltenham's maternity unit from proposed closure in 2006 which brought together MPs, this council, trades unions and royal colleges and local campaigners and reflected the huge support from local people for a friendly, local maternity service within quick and easy reach;**
- 8. Invites the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities to communicate the contents of this motion to the chief executive of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and all members of the NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board, and to seek reassurance that the NHS remains unambiguously committed to a permanent maternity service at Cheltenham General Hospital.**
- 9. Having been approved by this Council the Motion is referred to the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

13 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision

There were none.

14 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

RESOLVED THAT:

- in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 5: Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

15 Exempt Minutes

RESOLVED THAT

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June were approved and signed accordingly as a true record.

16 Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services introduced the report.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and speak in the debate.

RESOLVED THAT

The recommendations be approved.

17 A Financial Matter

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets introduced the report.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions to which responses were provided by the Cabinet Member and officer. Following debate it was

RESOLVED

That the recommendations be approved.