

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 5 December 2023

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 6.30 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Victoria Atherstone, Iain Dobie, Martin Horwood, Alisha Lewis and Max Wilkinson

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive) and Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets and Deputy S151 Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Clucas and Collins.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 07 November were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

One public question had been received, as follows:

1.Question from Ms Vikki Lax to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood

Following the 2021 survey in relation to women & girls safety the Council committed to develop a pledge for women's safety and incorporate that pledge within its licensing policy, per the link below.

[Safety of women in the evening and at night-time - Cheltenham Borough Council - Citizen Space](#)

The minutes of the 18th October 2021 included a proposed action in March 2022 to "bring forward amendments to the council's licensing policy".

[Agenda for Council on Monday, 18th October, 2021, 2.30 pm - Modern Council \(cheltenham.gov.uk\)](#)

Can the member please confirm which amendments have been brought forward for inclusion within the council's licensing policy and when they were or will be incorporated into the policy.

Cabinet Member response

The Council continues to take the issue of violence against women and girls very seriously – not least by commissioning surveys like the one referred to in your question which is an ongoing project with the current “[Safety of Women and Girls in Cheltenham](#)” survey due to complete in February 2024. This includes the public pledge proposal and if respondents see this as a priority for change we will work through the multi-agency group to develop and launch the pledge. In the meantime we have amended licensing policies and undertaken a variety of steps to inform and improve our work wherever it can have an impact on the safety of women and girls.

Since the completion of the 2021 survey, the council has set up a multi-agency group that includes representation from:

- Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS)
- Gloucestershire Rape And Sexual Abuse Centre (GRASAC)
- Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
- Gloucestershire Police
- Cheltenham Borough Homes
- The University of Gloucestershire
- Nelson Trust
- Cheltenham Business Improvement District
- Victim Support

Through this group we have developed a range of projects and initiatives such as

- Working to successfully retain the town's Purple Flag status, which is externally and independently assessed, giving assurance that Cheltenham remains a safe and diverse evening and night-time economy to visit.
- Active bystander training
- Securing funding for additional CCTV equipment in high-risk areas

- Supporting the current international ‘16 days of action’ to raise awareness of and campaign against gender-based violence.

As part of the 16 days of action campaign, the council is undertaking another survey on the safety of women at night within which we are asking people for their priorities in making change to improve the safety of women and girls. This survey specifically asks respondents to prioritise more actions we should be taking.

Out of 141 responses to date, respondents have identified the following as priorities for further change:

- Educating young people on positive relationships and appropriate behaviour
- A zero tolerance approach by pubs and clubs
- Improved lighting in the town
- Public statement/pledge

So the interim results of the survey show there is support for the pledge proposal amongst other practical actions. If confirmed in the final results we will work through the multi-agency group to develop and launch the pledge.

On our licensing work and policies specifically, we have worked to embed safeguarding in a range of licensable activities:

- We have adopted amendments to our taxi and private hire licensing policies to mandate safeguarding training, including refresher training, for all licenced taxi and private hire drivers.
- The same policy also reflects the new Department for Transport’s statutory guidance on “fit and proper persons”, making clear that licence holders should not be given the benefit of the doubt where their fitness to hold a licence is called into question
- In our alcohol licensing work and policies, we have delivered free bystander training to licensees, managers and door staff;
- Council licensing staff have also attended bystander training;

The pledge may well play a part in our future awareness-raising and education on this important issue but the council continues to prioritise the safety of women and girls in our licensing and other work and to deepen our partnership with domestic abuse and rape crisis organisations and others with frontline experience.

The response was taken as read.

5 Treasury Mid-term Report, 2023-24

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced his report, saying that regulations require the council to regularly review and scrutinise the treasury

management activities undertaken each year, to include the investments we hold as well as the borrowings we have taken out to fund key projects and programmes. He said this report is important as it provides details of outturn position for treasury activities for the first six months of this financial year and outlines how activities are compliant with the council's policies previously approved by members in March 2023.

He said the report shows that we are still experiencing pressure in our budget as a result of the rise in the Bank of England rate in the first five months of the year, which has specifically impacted our temporary borrowing we currently hold which is more exposed to rate changes. These pressures are also reported in the Q2 monitoring report which is also on the agenda..

He assured members that work is ongoing as part of the 2024/25 budget process to review our borrowing and minimise the risk of additional pressures being created when existing fixed rate loans expire and may attract much higher interest in new or temporary deals.

He said the report has been presented and discussed at the Treasury Management panel, and with colleagues' support this evening, it will be recommended onto Full Council.

There were no questions or comments from Members.

**RESOLVED THAT:
the contents of the summary report of the treasury management activity during the first six months of 2023/24 be noted and recommended on to Council.**

6 Garden Waste Charges - ITEM WITHDRAWN

This item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

7 Corporate Risk Register

In introducing the report, the Leader said that the Corporate Risk Register is a really important document, highlighting the need to be risk aware but not risk averse. She said a lot of detail is included in the report, and thanked officers, in particular Ann Wolstencroft, for their input.

There were no questions or comments on this item.

RESOLVED THAT:

the Corporate Risk Register be noted.

8 Award of rent support grant to voluntary sector organisations

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced his report, which details rent support applications from 1st Hatherley Scouts in Penrith Road and North and West Gloucestershire Citizens Advice (now tenants in the basement of the Municipal Offices). He said the rent support grant scheme enables the council to support the viability of the voluntary and community sector organisations renting our properties and the benefits they provide to Cheltenham's social and economic wellbeing.

He went on to say that in order to qualify for rent support, organisations must demonstrate how their use of the property contributes to the council's agreed corporate priorities. Each application is assessed in terms of their contribution to four criteria - the environment, the economy and cultural vitality, safe and strong communities, and strengthening the emotional and physical wellbeing of residents – and the amount of subsidy recommended relates to the degree to which the applicant meets each of the criteria.

In commending the report to the Cabinet, he highlighted how much the voluntary and community sector does in support of the wellbeing of the town, and said it is a privilege to offer rent support grants to organisations that occupy council buildings.

The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for bringing the report, saying she was particularly pleased that the council was supporting Citizens' Advice Bureau, who do so much for residents all across Cheltenham, including benefit and money advice and help with home efficiency grants. She expressed her appreciation for all the work they do.

The Leader echoed the comments of the Cabinet Member for Finance, aware of the vast amount of work volunteer groups do in Cheltenham, helping to make it a special place to live.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. the following rent support grant be agreed :

Applicant: 1st Hatherley Scouts, Scout Headquarters, Penrith Rd

Recommended rent support grant: A rent support grant of 64% of the current market rent

Applicant: North & West Gloucestershire Citizens Advice, Room B13 and B14, Municipal Offices

Recommended rent support grant: A rent support grant of 64% of the current market rent

2. authority be delegated to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader, in consultation with the Director: One Legal to agree the terms of a rent support grant agreement with the applicant.

9 Budget Monitoring Report, Q2 2023-24

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report, which presented the forecast outturn position against our 2023/24 budget that was approved by Full Council in February of this year.

He reminded Members that, due to inflationary pressures on energy costs, pay awards and interest rate increases in 2022/23, the council needed £2.6m from general balances to balance its budget, which thankfully general balances were at a level to support.

He said that moving into 2023/24, £150k was budgeted to be added to general balances by the 31st March 2024. At this point in the year, the forecast is that by year end we will have overspent against our approved budget by £700k. This is compared to a forecast overspend of £475k at the end of June – there are a number of pressures reported in the Q1 monitor which have increased since the previous Cabinet presentation and these are outlined in the report.

He added that there are also a number of ongoing external factors outside of the council's control - interest rates, inflation, higher than budgeted Payaward – but that the council's focus continues to be on the areas of the budget that it can control.

He said he has reported many times over the last 18 months that the council's balances and reserves are finite and without making further contributions to general balances, it will need to identify additional savings and efficiencies above the current Medium Term Financial Strategy. The council needs to focus on mitigating the forecasted overspends in the budget detailed in the report and making sure that identified savings and efficiencies are delivered as planned.

He concluded by putting on record his thanks to Gemma and the finance team for their continued efforts during these turbulent economic times.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and all the finance team for their work under incredible pressure. With councils around the country going under, this is a stressful time, and there is much to be grateful for in the report, with the team working hard to find areas to keep CBC afloat. She regretted that local authorities across the country find themselves in this position following the autumn statement, which did nothing to help them, and was grateful that CBC has the Cabinet member and finance team who care about protecting services and people in Cheltenham.

RESOLVED THAT:

the contents of this report be noted, including the key projected variances to the general fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2023/24 revenue and capital budgets approved by Council on 20 February 2023 and the actions to

ensure overspends are reduced as far as possible by the end of the financial year.

10 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to share any briefings or updates.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency thanked the climate team, who had just finished the arduous task of preparing the carbon footprint report for consideration by Council. She was also happy to report that Cheltenham Town Football Club had now installed its solar panels, part-funded by CBC as part of the Green Deal. It is one of the biggest solar installations in the football league and she is proud that CBC helped make it happen.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being was pleased to report that with S106 funding and hard work from the Public Art Panel, officers at Cheltenham Trust and other officers, two people have been appointed to manage the Celebrating Women project, which will be ready in time for International Women's Day next year.

He also thanked everyone who has helped with the ice rink. He attended the opening with Tweedy the Clown and the Mayor, and is happy to see so many people having fun. In addition, it is highly positive that the equipment is being run on vegetable oil, using technology endorsed by Planet Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services noted that a Friends of QE2 park in Battledown had been established and commenced work. He recognised the valuable work such groups make to the borough's green spaces and was pleased to see that such groups had doubled in recent years.

The Cabinet Member Housing wished to put on record her huge thanks to housing officers who have managed to complete the purchase of 21 new homes, part funded by government, for 20 Ukrainian families and one Afghan family. This was a particular feat due to the incredibly tight timescales involved.

She then reported that progress was being made following the decision to bring housing services back in house. There would be imminent engagement with tenants and leaseholders to create a new offer. The consultation will close in mid -February and she was looking forward to receiving feedback and shaping the new offer with them.

The Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services wished to congratulate the CBC planning team in terms of its position in the regulatory league table which considers the speed at which planning applications are determined. He reported that in the category of household and minor applications, which represents the vast majority of applications 86% were determined on time. This was well above the UK

average and almost the best in the county. He explained that major applications were much more complex and can take years but even then 82% were determined on time. This presented a very good overall picture, particularly in light of staffing challenges and different leadership. He wished to congratulate the whole team, which was now led by Chris Gomm who had recently taken up the post of Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reported that some months ago a decision had been made to dispose of land, in the form of a car park, at Idsall Drive in Prestbury. At the request of the Leader and with the support of property officers, he reignited conversations with Prestbury Parish Council about its purchase. At the last Parish Council meeting the decision was made not to purchase and therefore he wished to report that it would be put on the open market.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member for meeting with the Parish Council, highlighting the important part they play in the local governance of the town. She reported that she had recently attended the Parish Councils (C5) away day where the Director of Communities and Economic Development gave a presentation on the Community Infrastructure levy and there were group discussions and debate on sustainability and climate change. She was pleased to meet not only Cheltenham's parish councillors but also representatives from those Parish Councils which border our boundaries.

The Leader highlighted the current financial difficulties councils were facing, citing the more recent Nottingham example. She then referred to a recent Leadership Gloucestershire meeting to discuss homelessness and the government decision to speed up the approval process for refugees. Concern had been expressed that by the time the notification is received there are seven days to leave. An announcement was made that day that government had changed on this. A further meeting of Leadership Gloucestershire had taken place that day so districts were working together to tackle the issues and no one authority should carry the burden financially since there was no government finance available. A suggestion had been made to launch a small number of reigniting homes for Ukraine scheme via the County Council, albeit this would not be permanently funded. GARAS was providing sleeping bags but it was unacceptable to have people living on the streets through no fault of their own. As a town of sanctuary CBC wanted to do all it could but financial support from government was needed to do this.

11 Cabinet Member Decisions

The Cabinet Member Housing was pleased to have supported two local organisations, [CCP](#) and [Open Door](#) with a small grant award, each as part of the DHLUC rough sleeping programme. These organisation do fantastic work in communities in the borough.

The Leader reported that she had [endorsed the nomination](#) of Councillor Stan Smith, the newly elected PAB Councillor in Prestbury Ward, to Prestbury United Charities which provided support across the town.

The Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services was happy to take the [decision to contract for bedding plants](#). He wished to put on record that this decision to contract bedding plants for a couple of town centre gardens does not imply that CBC has ceased its commitment to plant more perennial flowers and plants across Cheltenham's green spaces.