

# Cheltenham Borough Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

**Meeting date:** 25 March 2024

**Meeting time:** 6.00 pm - 7.50 pm

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**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

Tabi Joy (Chair), Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Graham Beale, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Stan Smith, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams

**Also in attendance:**

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## **1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Nelson and Fifield.

## **2 Declarations of interest**

There were none.

## **3 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the February meeting were signed as a true record.

## **4 Public and Member questions, calls for actions and petitions**

There were none.

## **5 Cabinet Briefing**

Councillor Hay as Leader addressed the committee with her update. As Council has been held recently there was nothing new to update the committee on other than the progression of the transition of Cheltenham Borough Homes to Cheltenham Borough

Council. The Chair agreed to hear the update at this item rather than later in the agenda.

The Leader explained that she had signed the papers to confirm the winding up of CBH. John Rawson has come forward to be on the board, which is appreciated and he will be an asset to the board. The Chief Executive has spoken to all but one teams. It is hoped that the TUPE process will be completed by the end of July.

## **6 Matters referred to committee**

Members were aware of the motion that was approved in Council on the 18<sup>th</sup> March with regard to Special Needs in Schools. It was agreed that the Leader would contact Gloucestershire County Council for specific information and on receipt of that reply the relevant GCC Cabinet Member and relevant officers be invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

There had also been a request received from the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities to invite the CEO of the Hospitals Trust to a meeting of this committee to answer questions with regard to the Panorama programme and maternity unit closure implications.

The Leader agreed that this would be a positive thing to ask the CEO of the Trust to attend.

One Member reiterated this and stated that with regards to women having their babies, she has heard of cases where women are holding on so they have their children in Cheltenham and not Gloucester.

It was agreed that the CEO of the Hospitals Trust would be asked to attend the July meeting.

## **7 CBC Flood Risk Management Overview**

The report was as published and the Member who had submitted questions in advance of the meeting had no further questions.

The response to Member questions were as follows:

- Sewage overflows is primarily a Severn Trent issue rather than a CBC of GCC one, however it was stated by the Flood Risk and Drainage Officer from CBC that the work we do in flood alleviation and planning can reduce the amount of surface water entering the combined sewer system. We are not currently aware of any infrastructure upgrades Severn Trent are implementing other than the scheme mentioned for the River Chelt.
- The GCC Flood Risk Manager explained that water quality enforcement is undertaken by the Environment Agency and not GCC or CBC but we can work closely with them to advise.

- Severn Trent have an ongoing maintenance plan and both CBC and GCC will look to work with Severn Trent more and push everything they can to reduce surface water entering the combined system, although this is a huge engineering task and there isn't the money. One Member disagreed with this due to the amount of profit that the water companies make. Residents try and do things to help the situation but the water companies don't match it. He also stated that raw sewage being pumped out does negate the work that is being done with regard to biodiversity.
- There are currently no collaborative schemes being implemented in Cheltenham, but there are quarterly meetings with Severn Trent. There is a restoring our rivers task and finish group, it is a shared problem and we will continue to work with Severn Trent. The GCC officer suggested that Severn Trent are invited to the Overview and Scrutiny committee to discuss the flooding issues and the wider issues.
- With regard to development across a flood plain, the Strategic Local Plan is coming and part of that process will be an update to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. If there is a risk of flooding on a site the statutory flood officer will offer advice on the application. GCC do not make the final call in their role as consultee and they can only say whether surface water runoff is lesser or greater and how that is managed by the drainage system. The final decision to permit development is with the planning authority.
- Building on the functional flood plain is not recommended and GCC will object to such proposals.
- GCC has no jurisdiction over the boroughs but work very closely with them.

The GCC officer closed by thanking CBC for being ahead of the game on flood management compared to some of the other districts due to having 1.5 full-time equivalent in flood risk management.

## **8 Climate Emergency Action Plan Update**

The Programme Director for Climate Change addressed the committee and made the following points:

- Domestic Heat emissions account for 42% of borough wide emissions, complicated by high number of heritage buildings in Cheltenham. They are an important part of the retrofit strategy that needs to be worked on. The Council is exploring best practice from Bath and West alongside approaches used in Kensington and Chelsea to inform its approach, including the potential for a proactive development consent order. Councillors suggested reviewing the approach taken by Cambridge University in successfully retrofitting a listed college building.
- The Retrofit Streets project that CBC have just kicked off, will be used to inform the retrofit strategy more broadly.

The responses to Member questions were as follows:

- Solar panels haven't yet been deployed as extensively as they could be, though energy planning is fundamental to the success of the plan.
- There has been a lot of time spent considering community funding, obviously money is an issue. Cotswold have been successful but there have been pitfalls. Crowdfunding is something that could be revisited after the election.
- The Cabinet Member for Climate explained that tree planting is complicated. A review of the previous projects indicate that some had not been as successful at the Council would have liked. The Council is looking at wide open spaces rather than in built up areas. Places are being particularly looked at that have friends groups to support the projects longer term, within wider open spaces.
- The Cabinet Member for Climate used the example of Golden Valley where mature and established trees on the site have been preserved to demonstrate the Council's approach around tree protection.
- The ecologist that is being recruited will be looking at bio diversity net gain as it has become a bigger issue due to changes in government legislation.

The Officer then finished the item by stating that CBC has made a really good start, but there is a need to focus on devising and delivering a costed plan of emission reduction internally to bring these down, with robust offsets to address the remainder. Alongside a need to focus on concentrate on key areas of Borough wide emissions. It is heartening to see the support for the things that Cheltenham has done already.

## **9 Cheltenham Physical Activity and Sports Strategy**

The Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships introduced the report as published.

For the council, we have a number of challenges and opportunities in relation to physical activity and sport that the strategy will address including how we get investment into our facilities and how we support more people in our communities to be physically active . The strategy will also help communities achieve their aims. For example, there has been work done with Leckhampton Rovers Football Club to help them develop Burrows Field which has been extremely successful. The council is currently working with Saracens football club to help them with their plans for a new community and sports hub

The draft vision for physical activity and sport was agreed by Cabinet in July. The summary is that we want all communities to be active and healthy. The report that is with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the update report that will be going to cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

The covering report goes into much more detail and is split into two parts: the built facility assessment and the playing pitch assessment. The officer noted that many schools are providing pitches, sports halls and swimming pools that are used by the local community. This provision is really important and the Council will seek to work with schools to protect this provision into the future.

The officer also noted that there is currently a deficit on 3G artificial grass pitches, All Saints Academy have the only publicly available one in the Borough, with the population of the borough there should be at least 5 in the area. Hockey players currently lose out as football is dominating the use of sand-based artificial pitches that they need for their sport.

The idea behind bringing the report to the committee is for elected members to review the findings of the two assessments and discuss potential next steps for the Council.

The responses to Member questions were as follows:

- The detailed reports do look at the disabled provision and areas where it could be improved including looking at school provision. It was noted that Belmont School has ambitions to be a sporting hub for disabled young people within their community.
- Artificial grass pitches do have some negative environmental impacts eg on flooding and wildlife etc but it does increase the capacity for people to enjoy sport. Research is taking place nationally about how best to mitigate these impacts.
- With regard to working with independent schools the Council will be working Cheltenham Education Partnership that brings all the state and independent schools together.
- Private sector gyms will continue to provide an important contribution to Cheltenhams health and wellbeing offer.
- From the responses to the physical activity survey, it was noted that some groups said that they don't feel safe when being physically active. The Council will engage with the County Council to emphasise the importance of street lighting to make people feel safer.
- In terms of barriers to being physically active, responses to the physical activity survey showed that cost, lack of time and feeling nervous to start something new were the top 3 barriers to people wanting to exercise. The results of the survey tell us that people want to be active in their local areas, and the council will look at what it can do to support communities provide more activity within their local areas.
- The Overview and Scrutiny potentially should get another chance to look at this issue post election and what we are going to prioritise as a Council.

## **10 Feedback from other scrutiny meetings attended**

The updates from the Gloucestershire Health O&S Committee and the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel were as published in the supplement.

It was explained that the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee are considering terms of reference for new scrutiny committee in advent of City and Region Board.

## **11 Updates from scrutiny task groups**

The following update was received from Cllr Nelson who is the representative on the CBH Scrutiny task group:

Paul Leo (Interim Director Housing Transformation) gave a very swift update on the Transformation Project ahead of the Project Board Meeting that afternoon. The main purpose of PBM being to kick start the project, given that the decision to wind up CBH has already been made by the Leader who, I am sure, will tell us more. The Overall Project Plan has key milestones, key dates and covers issues including transfer of assets, IT, Finance, Governance, People Plan and TUPE and more. Target date for transfer is likely to be confirmed as 1<sup>st</sup> July. By the next meeting of Task Group (on April 19) we should have sight of the Overall Project Plan.

A question was raised around Comms. CBC and CBH Comms teams are already merged and within that is a dedicated group responsible for transition comms for the duration of the project.

We then spent the rest of the meeting going through proposed future governance arrangements. Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer) gave us a comprehensive and clear presentation of Transition Governance Arrangements including impact of regulations coming into force from 1<sup>st</sup> April.

She identified key areas where regulations have changed, explained the various "Consumer Gradings" (a bit like Ofsted inspection!). We covered the changing landscape, impact on tenants and need for transparency; the current CBH organisation and the emerging transition structure, including Cabinet and Member proposed involvement / responsibilities. It is proposed to set up a Cabinet Housing Committee that will interface with Tenant Panel, Cabinet, O&S and Audit Committees – all makes absolute sense.

I'd like to take this opportunity to put on record the Task Group's thanks to Claire for putting this together and for her clear explanations leading us through it.

## **12 Review of scrutiny workplan**

There were no decisions to be made, however one Member made the point that post election there might be new Members on the committee who would like to bring forward things for the scrutiny work plan. The committee needs to ensure that it is collaborative and non-political.

## **13 Any other item that the Chair determines to be urgent**

There were none.

## **14 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Monday June 3<sup>rd</sup> which will be a dedicated training session delivered by an external trainer for the new Members of the committee and any other Members who wish to attend including the Cabinet.