

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 7 November 2023

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 6.40 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Victoria Atherstone, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Martin Horwood and Alisha Lewis

Also in attendance:

Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Paul Jones (Executive Director of Finance, Assets and Regeneration), Ann Wolstencroft (Head of Performance, Projects & Risk), Emma Cathcart (Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit) and Sanjay Mistry (Head of Commercial and Income Generation)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Wilkinson.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on:

- 28 September 2023
- 17 October 2023

were approved as true records and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were no Member questions or petitions. Two public questions had been received, as follows. The questions and written responses were taken as read.

i. Question from Mr Steven Thomas to Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Councillor Alisha Lewis

As a Cheltenham resident I am very concerned about the effects of geo-engineering on the wildlife, soils, water and air pollution levels in Cheltenham.

It seems that this has not been considered in any of your documents about mitigating climate change.

It is my opinion that geo-engineering is the single biggest cause of man-made climate change and far exceeds any other contributory factors.

I have provided scientific evidence of this, alongside hundreds of weather modification patents.

<https://climateviewer.com/2014/03/24/geoengineering-weather-modification-patents/>

<https://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/883115/geoengineering-position-statement.pdf

Can you please advise if any steps are being taken by the council to mitigate the effects of geo-engineering in Cheltenham and whether it will be properly taken into account in your climate policies?

Cabinet Member response

Cheltenham Borough Council has a stated aspiration to mitigate the effects of climate change, regardless of cause, to reach net zero emissions by 2030 at a local level, supported by the climate Emergency Action Plan. Wider causal global macro environmental factors fall beyond our realistic scope.

Geo-engineering describes a set of technologies which encompass both Greenhouse Gas Removal and Solar Radiation Management which are designed to remove rather than increase greenhouse gas emissions, as per the government document you provided as an attachment above.

Our pathway does not specifically refer to either greenhouse gas removal technologies or solar radiation management. Our priority is to address greenhouse gas emissions at a local level, with particular focus on the council's carbon emissions. Solar radiation management would not be considered, given these technologies require very large-scale intervention. The only greenhouse gas removal

technologies we would likely implement, at our level, would be tree planting or other localised nature-based solutions.

Supplementary question

Governments around the world are facilitating deliberate stratospheric aerosol injections that are destroying lifestyles and eco-systems. Carbon dioxide is essential for life and does not cause climate change. Why not come clean about the real cause of man-made climate change instead of blaming it on peoples' cars?

Cabinet Member response:

If you provide evidence for the claims you are making, I will respond in writing.

ii. Question from Mr Steven Thomas to Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, Councillor Mike Collins

I am very concerned about the transparency and openness of the Golden Valley development. Of particular note is the lack of consultation with the public. Supposedly a consultation was carried out at the Gloscol Campus and a visit to the centre on a wet winter's day. Assuming that you are not a resident at the Gloscol Campus or were not in the town centre in January, then you would not have known about eh Golden Valley Development or had an opportunity to give you opinion.

I only know about the development because I have started taking an interest in the council's business but I would say that the large majority of Cheltenham residents have absolutely no idea about what is going on there.

Alongside NetZero and 5G, this yet another example of where the general public are being given no say in areas of huge significance, and is simply not acceptable.

Can you please advise why all Cheltenham Residents were not advised and consulted for their feedback on the Golden Valley development ~~before~~ the decision was taken.

Cabinet Member response

I would like to thank Mr Thomas for his question.

Since submission of your question, we have now responded to your freedom of Information request that highlights the extensive consultation exercise the council has undertaken on our development proposals for Golden Valley. Ahead of our public consultation days, we targeted 7,500 local homes with a leaflet drop and made all of the information available on our website. Additionally, a number of stakeholder engagement sessions were undertaken with key organisations and over 350 people were reached through the town centre 'pod'.

There were multiple opportunities for residents of the town to stay involved in the project and comment on the proposals develops, not least through the formal planning process.

It is not clear from your questions which 'decision' you are concerned about, but you may wish to consult the Council's website for information on decisions that have been made.

Supplementary question

Golden Valley Development is a major change for Cheltenham residents and will affect everyone. The leaflets say 350 new homes are to be built, whereas the website says 1000 homes – this is contradictory. Not everyone might want a smart district cyber hub which facilitates the government's agenda in Cheltenham. All residents should have been consulted. Why weren't all households notified and given the opportunity to make representations before the green light was given?

Cabinet Member response:

The 350 new homes referred to on the leaflet only represent part of the site, not the whole development.

I am happy with the consultation undertaken so far. As part of the response to your FOI request, you have received a comprehensive statement of community involvement, compiled by CBC's consultant HGH. This highlights four social value stakeholder engagements sessions, based on community, culture, economy and environment, where interested groups were invited to take part and ask questions.

7,500 homes received two leaflets, highlighting two public consultation events at GlosCol, which were attended by 130 people, many leaving feedback. A further 29 left feedback online, and 350 people attended two sessions at the pod on the Strand, also leaving feedback. There have also been 2,300 visits to the project website, with feedback left. The Golden Valley Development website provides a huge amount of information; there is information on the CBC website, and there have been articles in the press, including Gloucestershire Live, Punchline, and the BBC. In addition all CBC's and our development partner's social media platforms include articles and information about the project so far. I am more than happy with the level of public engagement so far.

Going forward, as stated in my written response, there will be multiple opportunities for residents to provide feedback and comments.

The statement of community involvement makes it clear that CBC has fulfilled its requirement to engage appropriately with local communities at the pre-app state and been fully compliant with its responsibilities.

5a Corporate Advertising and Sponsorship Policy

The Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income introduced the report, saying the corporate advertising and sponsorship policy had been introduced in 2015 and not updated since. In view of the many changes over that time, it was important to bring it up to date, in line with the corporate plan and priorities. It would be reviewed again in 2027.

He said the policy must meet current best practice, core values and principles. It was short and reasonably easy to understand and digest, with clear and helpful definitions, and links and guidelines to national best practice. He highlighted the following:

- the policy doesn't contain an exhaustive 'allow list', but follows a 'deny list' where the basic assumption is that advertising is permitted unless it falls into a prohibited category or is deemed to have an adverse impact;
- the potential impacts used when assessing whether or not to approve an application for advertising or sponsorship are set out at Paragraph 6.5 of the policy;
- the Head of Commercial Income and Regeneration is responsible for implementing the policy, with additional expertise provided by the council's communications team.

He hoped that Members would be happy to endorse the revised policy.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency commended the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income on this long-overdue update of the policy. She was happy with the overall quality of the document, permissive yet with clear guidance being the right approach to make us more robust and clear about what we stand for as an authority.

The Leader also thanked the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, saying that before Covid, the authority was doing well on its advertising policy and generating income to help the revenue budget. She welcomed this update.

The Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income said he spent time with the officer team, and considered the policy to be short and succinct, easy to follow and doing what it needed to do.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the updated Corporate Advertising & Sponsorship Policy, as at Appendix 4, is adopted, to come into immediate effect.**

5b Cheltenham Peer Challenge Report

The Leader introduced the report, telling Members that the council invited the Local Government Association to carry out a peer challenge exercise – this is not compulsory, but is beneficial to learning and development. The LGA team of Members and officers had prescribed areas to examine and investigate, and also looked at additional areas as the visit progressed. They came in summer and have now published their full report, which includes the requirement for the authority to publish an action plan and invite the peer group back within a year to check on progress. The action plan has been developed and some significant actions have

already been taken, arising from the recommendations for improvement. It is hoped that the LGA team will return in February 2024 to review what has been addressed at that stage.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said he had experienced a number of peer reviews over the years, and they are hugely beneficial – it is too easy for a council to get set in its ways and not look outside itself. They bring an external view, and an extensive list of experience and knowledge. The reviewers acknowledged the high standards that CBC sets and works to, but with the many changes local government is currently undergoing, the report and self-examination is hugely beneficial, and working through the action plan will pay huge dividends.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities welcomed the peer group's inclusion of the council's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) campaign to tackle deprivation. She pointed out that not only does the council work with schools, but also with NHS partners, businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, and a whole host of organisations to help young people in difficulty. She said it is a privilege to be part of this, and thanked the council, Members and officers for the work done over the past three years. We will all learn from the report, and continue to grow and attract more organisations.

The Leader agreed that it is good to look outside what we do – as an LG peer reviewer herself, she takes ideas away from other local authorities. It is a two-way street for learning and benefits, looking at good practice and good ideas from elsewhere.

RESOLVED THAT:

- i. the LGA Peer Challenge Report in Appendix 2 is noted;**
- ii. the Peer Challenge Action Plan in response to the recommendations within the Peer Challenge Report, as set out in Appendix 3, is approved;**
- iii. a further visit by the LGA Peer Team, expected in early 2024, to review the progress in delivering the action plan, is welcomed.**

5c Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Penalty and Prosecution Policy

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report, saying that CBC is a member of the counter-fraud partnership, and within the partnership the Counter-Fraud and Enforcement Unit is tasked with reviewing policies on the council's behalf and providing the necessary framework to deal with fraud and error in this area. Dealing with and handling public money comes with level of trust, with the risk of fraud ever present, and it is incumbent on the council to take actions to mitigate against the risks, something CBC takes extremely seriously. A number of minor changes have been made to the previous policy to align with current

legislation, a number of amendments included to reflect the duties and responsibilities of the Department of Work and Pensions and to provide continuity across the counter-fraud partnership to undertake investigations in this area.

The report and policy has been considered and endorsed by the Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee, and several relevant council departments and OneLegal have been consulted. He thanked Emma Cathcart and her team, and commended the report to Members.

The Cabinet Member for Housing said it is important to have this policy in place - ultimately, it is protecting public money and ensuring it can be used to support those people who really need it.

RESOLVED THAT:

- i. the Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Penalty and Prosecution Policy is adopted;**
- ii. authority is delegated to the Executive Director Finance, Assets and Regeneration to approve future minor amendments to the Policy in consultation with the Head of Revenues and Benefits and the Head of Service Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit.**

5d Council Tax Support Scheme 2024-25

Introducing his report, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets told Members that each year since 2013, the council has been required to set the level for council tax support for working-age residents. Funding for the scheme was introduced rolled into the revenue support grant and subject to annual cuts, and now that the council no longer received revenue support grants, it must fund its share of the cost of the scheme.

He said that in 2019-20, the council approved a new scheme to ensure the most vulnerable residents, on the lowest incomes, continue to receive 100% support. From April 2024, the proposed council tax support scheme for working age people will continue to be based on five income bands, with the highest providing 100% council tax liability support. With many residents still grappling with the cost of living crisis and high food inflation, those on the lowest income spend a disproportionately high percentage of their income on food, and this scheme provides support for the most financially vulnerable residents. Continuing to provide support across five bands will result in 4,483 will be eligible, with a budget of £4.3m set at October 2023.

He hoped Members would support the recommendation, pointing out that Recommendation 4 is required because the increase in welfare benefits isn't announced until late December/early January, and we must be in a position to adjust.

He thanked officers for the extraordinary amount of work they do, supporting residents of the town.

The Leader commented that this is one of the things that the council does which largely goes below the radar. She is proud of the council's original decision and the commitment it makes every year – we don't have to provide this support, but each year fewer councils give 100% relief to the very needy minority.

RESOLVED THAT:

- i. the outcome of the consultation on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in Appendix 3 is noted;**
- ii. the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers in Appendix 4 and summarised in Appendix 5 is approved as the preferred option for 2024/25;**
- iii. Council is recommended to approve the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers for 2024/25;**
- iv. Council is recommended to give authority to the Executive Director for Finance, Assets and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets to uprate any premiums, allowances and determine the income levels in line with any increase in Welfare Benefits by 23 February 2024**

6 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to share any updates and briefings.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency was pleased to confirm a new interim manager has started in the climate change department, and also that the data collected from smart systems in core buildings was going to be used to develop a new system for carbon reduction in all CBC buildings. She looked forward to seeing the results.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities said that next week is interfaith week, where everyone in the town, whether part of a faith community or not, is invited to take part, meet and chat at the various events taking place. In particular, the Indian community is inviting people to share vegetarian curry [pre-booking required]. She hoped everyone would enjoy the week and the community would benefit from it.

The Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services was very pleased to welcome Chris Gomm as new Head of Development Management, a role the council has struggled to recruit on a permanent basis. Joining from Bath, he promises to be an able new head of service, and one of his first priorities will be to tackle enforcement issues and develop an action plan to tackle the backlog of cases.

The Cabinet Member for Housing also welcomed interfaith week (12-19 November) and said she was delighted to accept an invitation from the YMCA, who in partnership with Cheltenham Interfaith and CBC, would be hosting a faith in housing event on 15 November. Welcoming leaders from all faith groups, the event will focus on how communities in Cheltenham can together tackle housing and homelessness. More [information](#) is available on line.

The Leader reported that she has attended a housing and homelessness summit organised by Eastbourne Council, an event which pulled together 160 councils and was attended by 300 people. All local councils have a statutory responsibility to tackle homelessness, but are struggling to cope when the government closes hotels, sending people to their local authority for help. She said a number of councils are facing potential 114 notices, not because of their revenue budgets per se but because of the increase in homelessness. It was a challenging event, with many horror stories, and she has signed a letter to lobby government about the problem, which she will bring to Council next month. This is an important issue for a great many residents, and potentially for many people in Cheltenham who will fall into the trap and be made homeless through no fault of their own.

7 Cabinet Member Decisions since the last meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services reported on his decision [To award a contract Dennis Eagle for supply of refuse vehicles](#). He said three refuse vehicles have been purchased, as pre-approved by Cabinet as part of the strategic vehicle fleet replacement programme. In line with the Cabinet decision of December 2021, these vehicles progress the council's move away from mineral diesel for its fleet, and towards certified palm oil and hydro-treated vegetable oil, and using smaller electric vehicles where possible. Use of these vehicles will reduce pollution and help combat climate change.