

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Minutes

8 October 2024

6.00 pm - 6.30 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer))

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September will be considered at the next meeting.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were no public or Member questions and no petitions on this occasion.

5 Approval of Budget Strategy, Process and Timetable

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced her report, which she said marked the start of the budget strategy process for 2024-25. Warning of the sizeable overspend to manage, the immense pressures on local government with more people requiring services and costs rising and with no additional government funding in prospect, she gave assurance that the finance team and Members would work together on decisions to close the gap and protect CBC's financial future.

In view of the tough choices and compromises to be made, she invited everyone to feed into the budget process through the public consultation which will run from mid-December to mid-January, and said suggestions would be welcome. In the new year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will go through the proposals with a fine toothcomb, and the final budget will be taken to full Council in February, where Members will decide whether to approve it.

She thanked everyone for their time and effort, and looked forward to a well-balanced and robust budget.

The Leader reiterated the importance of the consultation process and encouraged everyone to contribute, saying that the council remained committed to its clear and consistent priorities over the last two years

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the budget setting timetable at Appendix 2 and outlined in section 5 of this report is approved;**
- 2. the outline budget strategy outlined in section 6 is approved;**
- 3. the £734k overspend reported to Cabinet in September 2024 and large amount of work which will be required to close this gap and deliver the required savings and efficiencies in 2024/25 is noted;**
- 4. the intention for this council to remain in the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool in 2025-26 as outlined in section 7 is noted;**
- 5. the Section 151 Officer, Deputy Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets are requested to consider suggestions from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in preparing the interim budget proposals for 2025-26.**

6 Review of Floral Displays in the town centre

The Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Recycling and Public Realm introduced his report which, he said, aimed to improve biodiversity, reduce emissions, and make more efficient use of tax payers' money. He said switching from annual to perennial planting had been very successful and effective in various parks and green spaces around the town and that Ubico has ensured well-balanced and colourful displays. Although this is a change from what people are used to, he regards it as an exciting and innovative move, but added that traditional annual planting will remain in Imperial Gardens.

He said the reduction in hanging baskets around the town and introduction of more environmentally-friendly planting will bridge the gap between the existing planting schemes, and the removal of window boxes at the Municipal Offices and Town Hall will result in huge financial savings and efficiencies, as set out in the report, although the primary benefits will be nature recovery and helping combat the climate emergency.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency applauded the move, saying the costs of heating greenhouses, water and transportation will all be reduced, and the reduction in CO2 emissions will be calculated and factored into the Net Zero target.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture and Wellbeing strongly supported the report and environmentally-friendly and positive approach, saying this will demonstrate that planting can be beautiful as well as sustainable, and showcase more exotic gardening. He noted that more traditional planting would continue in Imperial Gardens, where interruptions from the festivals would make perennial planting unsuitable.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities was also supportive of the new way of working, and agreed that the report was eye-opening with regard to the amount of money spent on watering and transportation. This is a smart step – thanks to officers.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Regeneration commented that many people would not read the report and said the council must carry on the methods already implemented in some parks and green spaces in town, to show the vibrancy of perennials. He applauded Ubico's work and the report.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Recycling and Public Realm thanked Members for their support, and agreed that perennials encourage an appreciation of nature as they change throughout the year. They are not only good for the environment and for biodiversity, but also beautiful. This is exciting to see, and people may be encouraged to adopt a similar approach to their own gardens and hanging baskets.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the introduction of an alternative, and permanent perennial-based planting scheme on the Long Gardens is approved;**
- 2. the retention of the existing annual bedding-based planting scheme on Imperial Gardens is approved;**
- 3. the reduction of the number of hanging basket put out in the town from three hundred and six to one hundred (including removing from the municipal offices), and to focus them in the centre of the town to gain maximum effect with minimum maintenance is approved;**
- 4. the elimination of all window boxes from the Town Hall and Municipal Offices is agreed.**

7 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to brief colleagues on any matters of interest.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said he and all the senior members of the planning team have been working on the new planning enforcement policy, to ensure it is fair for all and fit for purpose. Work is also underway on the heritage strategy for the town, which is home to 2,600 listed buildings – the council is custodian and needs to get this right. Further details on both of these pieces of work will be brought to a future meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Recycling and Public Realm paid tribute to a member of the Ubico team who is celebrating 50 years' employment. He said such commitment to the town is a great achievement and something to be celebrated.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture and Wellbeing share several items:

- the Cheltenham Literature Festival is currently underway, a fantastic event celebrating its 75th birthday. He is pleased to report that over 90,000 tickets have been sold for over 500 events – this is almost back to pre-Covid levels – and that a record 12,000 schoolchildren are attending this year. In addition, the event is fossil-free for the second year, and also more accessible than it has been before, including better wheelchair access, AI-driven captioning of live events and more;
- turning to visual arts, he was recently been a guest of the Cheltenham Trust for the opening of two exciting exhibitions at the Wilson: *Natural Progression*, with the University of Gloucestershire, featuring high-quality work from its recent 2024 Creative Arts Degree Show, and *Into Abstraction*, in partnership with The Hepworth Wakefield and Gallery Pangolin, exploring the evolution of abstract art, of particular interest in view of the Hepworth bronzes near the Wilson;

- the Wilson has also announced that it was successfully bid for funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and will receive £200,000 to re-imagine and redisplay its collection in the best possible way, and engage more fully with the public;
- last Friday, Gloucestershire College welcomed the first students to its sustainable Construction Centre, and thanked CBC and Tracey Birkinshaw and her team for their help in securing the funding required to build the centre on budget and faster than scheduled. The centre will tackle a number of issues, offering opportunities to 250 local learners, benefitting local people, plugging the skills gap with sustainable construction skills such as solar panel and heat pump installation, whilst also being carbon neutral itself – all helping Cheltenham with its move towards its Net Zero target;
- the public health team at the county council has recently produced a profile of public health in Gloucestershire, informed by health data and ahead of grants allocation later this year. It is an interesting document which will be in the public domain, and perhaps shocking to learn that despite Cheltenham being an affluent town in many respects, it hides enormous areas of inequality and deprivation, with residents at risk from poverty and illness. It is also shocking to read about the high percentage of children with low self-esteem and mental health issues. He hoped that the grant programme will seek to address this, saying that although there is much to celebrate in the town, there are still some real challenges.

The Leader spoke about the sale of the Municipal Offices, which has recently gone live and sparked a lot of interest. This is very encouraging at the start of an exciting journey, and although some people are sad to see the building go, it is better for the environment and economy that it will be used more fully.

8 Cabinet Decisions since the last meeting

Members reported on the decisions they have taken since the last meeting on 24 September:

1. [Award of contract for timber fire doors](#)

25 September 2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that following significant investment over the last few years, this contract allowed the council to bring all doors on council-owned properties up to spec, including non-standard size doors and those in listed buildings.

2. [Response to National Planning Policy Framework consultation](#)

25 September 2024

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said a lot of work had gone into the response, which ensured that all documents and policies are compliant.

3. [Response to Local Government Guide Consultation Draft 2024](#)

01 October 2024

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said CBC had worked with Joint Strategic Plan partners (Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough) and the county council on a collective response to this draft consultation, the final version of which will come back for consideration.

4. [Shareholder Decision for Gloucestershire Airport](#)

27 September 2024

The Leader reported that the board of Gloucestershire Airport needed two new board members in order to be quorate, and it was felt more appropriate in the current situation to appoint a representative from each of the two shareholder councils. She has therefore appointed Councillor Collins to represent CBC.

9 Any other business

There was none.