

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet

Meeting date: Tuesday, 8 October 2024

Meeting time: 6.00 pm

Meeting venue: Council Chamber - Municipal Offices

Membership:

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

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Contact: democraticservices@cheltenham.gov.uk

Phone: 01242 264 246

SECTION 1 : PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1 Apologies

2 Declarations of interest

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

Questions must be received no later than 12 noon on the seventh working day before the date of the meeting

SECTION 2 :THE COUNCIL

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Council on this occasion

SECTION 3 : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this occasion

SECTION 4 : OTHER COMMITTEES

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by other Committees on this occasion

SECTION 5 : REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS AND/OR OFFICERS

5 Approval of Budget Strategy, Process and Timetable (Pages 5 - 16)

Report of Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

6 Review of Floral Displays in the town centre (Pages 17 - 40)

Report of Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

SECTION 6 : BRIEFING SESSION

7 Briefings from Cabinet Members

SECTION 7 : DECISIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS

Member decisions taken since the last Cabinet meeting



CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**SECTION 8 : ANY OTHER ITEM(S) THAT THE LEADER
DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND REQUIRES A DECISION**

Section 10: BRIEFING NOTES

Briefing notes are circulated for information with the Cabinet papers but are not on the agenda

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet 08 October 2024

Budget Strategy, Process & Timetable 2025-26

Accountable member:

Cllr Alisha Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets

Accountable officer:

Gemma Bell, Director of Finance and Assets (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to propose a broad strategy and outline a process for setting the budget and council tax for 2025-26. It outlines a number of principles that need to be established at this stage to enable budget preparation to commence.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. Approves the budget setting timetable at Appendix 2 and outlined in section 5 of this report.**
- 2. Approves the outline budget strategy outlined in section 6.**
- 3. Notes 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.**
- 4. Notes the intention for this Council to remain in the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool in 2025-26 as outlined in section 7.**

- 5. Requests that the Section 151 Officer, Deputy Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets consider suggestions from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in preparing the interim budget proposals for 2025-26.**
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1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

This report sets out the budgetary process for 2025-26 and the general financial parameters under which the budget will be prepared.

There are no property/asset implications arising from the content of the report or recommendations.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Director of Finance and Assets (Deputy Section 151 Officer), gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

None specifically arising from the report recommendations. The budget setting process is governed by the Budget and Policy Framework Rules (contained in the Council Constitution) and the process recommended in this report is designed to meet the requirements of those Rules.

Signed off by: One Legal, legalservices@onelegal.co.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The annual budget aims to deliver the outcomes defined by the Council's corporate business plan, including the priority to be carbon neutral by 2030, and resourcing should be aligned to the delivery of corporate plan priorities.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Director of Finance and Assets (Deputy Section 151 Officer), gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Enhancing Cheltenham's reputation as the cyber capital of the UK
- Working with residents, communities and businesses to help make Cheltenham #netzero by 2030
- Increasing the number of affordable homes through our £180m housing investment plan

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity
 - Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council
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2 Background

2.1 The responsibility for preparing the budget in line with the Council's policy framework, taking proper account of technical and professional advice and presenting proposals to Council for approval, lies with the Cabinet.

2.2 It is customary for the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, at this time of year, to present a report on the budget process. Accordingly, this report aims to outline a process designed to arrive at an acceptable budget.

2.3 The budget and policy framework requires that the Council publish a timetable setting out the key dates in the budget setting process. A draft budget timetable, attached for approval at Appendix 2, sets out the sequence of events leading up to the setting of the budget and council tax level for 2025-26. The timetable allows sufficient time to consider alternative budget proposals or amendments put forward to the budget proposed by the Cabinet.

3 The Budget Setting Timetable and Process

3.1 The proposed key stages in the process for setting the budget for 2025-26 are summarised in the timetable at Appendix 2 and are detailed below. The timing of events may change as the process develops.

Budget Preparation

3.2 Between October and December 2024, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and officers will work with the Cabinet towards the creation of 'interim budget' proposals which will make the following assumptions:

- The projection will be for a standstill budget, prepared under a general philosophy of no growth in levels of service.
- Budgeted for employee pay inflation and an increase in member's allowances for 2025-26 which will include contingency for any pay award.
- An inflationary increase of the relevant costs in the base budget.
- The impact of prevailing interest rates on the investment portfolio will be assessed in preparing the budget. The Treasury Management Panel will consider the position in respect of treasury management activity during the budget setting cycle.
- An assessment of the charges made to Cheltenham Borough Homes and the Housing Revenue Account will be incorporated in the budget proposals, including assessing the impact on the General Fund of the change in activity for 2024-25 and beyond following the transfer of housing services back in-house.

- A council tax increase of 3% will be used for modelling purposes.

Publication of Initial Budget Proposals

3.3 The Cabinet will present its initial budget proposals and publish them for consultation in line with the advertised plan. The initial budget proposals will include all general fund revenue, capital and housing revenue account estimates to meet a balanced budget, together with assumptions made on future council tax and rent levels.

3.4 The Budget Scrutiny Working Group will also support the budget process during this consultation period by considering options for addressing any funding gap. The consultation process is outlined in more detail in Section 10. This also provides an opportunity for alternative budget proposals to be submitted to the Director of Finance & Assets for assessment.

Final Budget Proposals and Council Approval

3.5 At the end of the consultation period, the Cabinet will draw up firm budget proposals having regard to the responses received. In drawing together its budget proposals to Council the report will reflect the comments made by consultees and the Cabinet's response. The firm budget proposals will be presented to Council at the budget setting meeting for decision in February 2025.

Housing Revenue Accounts

3.6 Draft proposals for the Housing Revenue Account will also form part of the same process for considering the General Fund revenue and capital budgets.

4 Cabinet Budget Strategy

4.1 The 2024-25 budget monitoring report presented in September 2024 reported a forecast net overspend against the budget of £734k for the current financial year. The variances will continue to be monitored through the year, in particular the progress on at risk saving targets.

4.2 Our current financial position demonstrates that even with the financial planning decisions taken by Officers and Members over recent years, we are still facing significant uncertainty and volatility in managing the resources available to the Council to deliver services to our residents and communities.

4.3 The proposal to fund the projected overspend using balances and reserves will provide the council with a short term solution. However, the at risk savings for 2024-25 will still need to be delivered in 2025-26, this is not a sustainable funding mechanism.

4.4 Balances and reserves have reached their lowest levels in years and we cannot continue to rely on finite resources to meet the budget gap without restoring reserve levels closer to their 2019/20 levels. To continue providing high-quality services to residents, decisions need to be taken about savings and efficiencies in order to replenish the resources used since 2020/21.

4.5 The 2025/26 budget proposal and Medium Term Financial Strategy need to set out how

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the council will balance these long and short term pressures, ensure levels of reserves are maintained appropriately whilst also continuing to focus resources on our key priorities. This is a huge challenge and Officers and Members will need to continue to be proactive in reviewing efficiencies and prioritising resources to bridge the budget gap.

4.6 In 2024/25 a four-year savings strategy was approved which was weighted towards delivering £2.741m of base budget savings in year one. This is an incredibly ambitious target, particularly in the current economic environment and officers and Members have been working together to review options for re-aligning our resources.

4.7 A specific focus of this strategy has been reviewing discretionary spend across all service areas against the Corporate Plan to determine whether services can be delivered differently and ensure the Council are able to achieve our key priorities.

4.8 Some proposals have already been implemented and key decisions taken where applicable in line with the constitution. Further proposals are being developed in consultation with the Cabinet to build a four-year plan to balance the budget gap. The four-year proposal will be available as part of the draft budget for consultation in December 2024.

5 Business Rates Retention – Pooling Arrangements

5.1 In October 2012, Council approved the principal of Cheltenham joining the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool, subject to a thorough assessment of risks and rewards and agreement of satisfactory governance arrangements.

5.2 Continuation within the pool was delegated to the Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive and this is reviewed on an annual basis.

5.3 The Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool was set up in 2013/14 to maximise the business rate income retained within the County and to support economic growth within the area of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

5.4 The membership of the Gloucestershire pool is being reviewed by all members of the pool at the end of September. Once a confirmation has been made this report will be updated with the details prior to the 8th October.

6 Reasons for recommendations

6.1 The Council is required to agree a budget process and timetable as part of the Financial Regulations set out in the council's constitution.

7 Alternative options considered

7.1 It is important that any political group wishing to make alternative budget proposals should discuss them, in confidence, with the Director of Finance & Assets (preferably channelled through one Group representative) to ensure that the purpose, output and source of funding of any proposed change is identified.

7.2 Given the financial pressures and the potentially very difficult decisions which will have to be made, it is very important that there is time for members to carefully consider and evaluate any alternative budget proposals. Political groups wishing to put forward

alternative proposals are not obliged to circulate them in advance of the budget-setting meeting, but in the interests of sound and lawful decision-making, it would be more effective to do so, particularly given that they may have implications for staff.

8 Consultation and feedback

8.1 The formal budget consultation period will be no less than four weeks and will take place during 17 December 2024 to 18 January 2025. The Cabinet will seek to ensure that the opportunity to have input into the budget consultation process is publicised to the widest possible audience. During the consultation period all interested parties will be welcome to provide feedback on the initial budget proposals. Groups, businesses, tenants, residents, staff and trade unions will be encouraged to comment on the draft budget proposals at this time. They will be asked to identify, as far as possible, how alternative proposals complement the Council's Corporate Plan, how they will be financed, and how they will help the Council to achieve best value. Presentations will be made to key business groups as part of the consultation process.

8.2 The Budget Scrutiny Working Group and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to review the interim budget proposals in the meetings scheduled for 9 January 2025 and feed any comments back to the Cabinet.

8.3 Whilst the Cabinet will be as flexible as possible, it is unlikely that any comments received after the consultation period can be properly assessed to consider their full implications and to be built into the budget. Accordingly, if alternative budget proposals are to come forward, this should happen as early as possible.

8.4 All comments relating to the initial budget proposals should be returned to the Director of Finance & Assets by the end of the consultation period for consideration by the Cabinet in preparing their final budget proposals. Consultation questionnaires will be available in key locations and for completion on line via the Council's website. Comments can be e-mailed to moneymatters@cheltenham.gov.uk.

9 Key risks

9.1 The key risks are set out in Appendix 1.

Report author:

Jon Whitlock, Chief Accountant, jon.whitlock@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. Risk Assessment
2. Budget Setting Timetable

Background information:

Budget Monitoring Report 2024-25 – Position at 31 July 2024

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If the Council is unable to come up with long term solutions which close the gap in the medium term financial strategy then it will find it increasingly difficult to prepare budgets year on year without making unplanned cuts in service provision.	Cabinet	5	3	15	Reduce	The budget strategy projection includes 'targets' for work streams to close the funding gap which aligns with the council's corporate priorities.	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	Ongoing
	If the Budget Strategy (Support) Reserve is not suitably resourced insufficient reserves will be available to cover anticipated future deficits resulting in the use of General Balances which will consequently fall below the minimum required level as recommended by the Section 151 Officer in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	5	4	20	Reduce	The MTFs is clear about the need to enhance reserves and identifies a required reserves strategy for managing this issue. In preparing the budget for 2025/26 and in ongoing budget monitoring, consideration will continue to be given to the use of fortuitous windfalls and potential future	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
							under spends with a view to strengthening reserves whenever possible.		
	If income streams from the introduction of the business rates retention scheme in April 2013 are impacted by the loss of major business and the constrained ability to grow the business rates in the town then the MTFS budget gap may increase.	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	5	4	20	Accept & Monitor	<p>The Council joined the Gloucestershire pool to share the risk of fluctuations in business rates revenues retained by the Council.</p> <p>The Gloucestershire S151 Officers continue to monitor business rates income projections and the performance and membership of the pool / pilot.</p> <p>Work with members and Gloucestershire LEP to ensure Cheltenham grows its business rate base.</p>	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If the robustness of the income proposals is not sound then there is a risk that the income identified within the budget will not materialise during the course of the year.	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	4	4	16	Reduce	Robust forecasting is applied in preparing budget targets taking into account previous income targets, collection rates and prevailing economic conditions. Professional judgement is used in the setting / delivery of income targets. Greater focus on cost control and income generation will be prioritised to mitigate the risk of income fluctuations.	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	Ongoing
	If the assumptions around government support, business rates income, impact of changes to council tax discounts prove to be incorrect, then there is likely to be increased volatility around future funding streams.	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	5	3	15	Reduce	Work with Publica and countywide CFO's to monitor changes to local government financing regime including responding to government consultation on changes Business Rates and the Fair Funding review. The assumptions regarding government support	Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
							have been mitigated to a certain extent by the acceptance of a multi-year settlement agreement.		

Date	Action
October and November 2024	Leadership Team work with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets to identify options for efficiencies and additional income.
8 October 2024	Cabinet approve the budget strategy - guidelines, timetable and estimated funding gap for 2025/26 and the Cabinet's approach to the budget / MTFS
11 October 2024	Deadline to submit CTB1 return to MHCLG .
30 October 2024	Government Autumn Statement announcement.
11 November 2024	Treasury Management Panel to consider budget estimates for treasury management budget assumptions.
2 December 2024	Deadline for preparation of the draft budget, including proposals for savings / income and growth to be identified for the council and its partner organisations.
6 December 2024	Calculate taxbase figure for Section 151 Officer. Sign off under delegated powers and production of briefing note for Lead Member after council decision on 16 December re council tax support scheme
16 December 2024	Council approves council tax support scheme.
16 December 2024	S151 Officer to sign off the Council tax base
17 December 2024	Cabinet present interim budget proposals for consultation incorporating partner organisations budgets including proposals for growth, savings and levels of fees and charges.
17 December 2024 to 17 January 2025	Cabinet consult on interim budget proposals including the public and the business community
Throughout January 2024	Trade Union meetings on draft budget proposals.
	Budget Working group - review consultation and make recs to O&S committee on budget
	O&S Committee consider recommendations from budget working group and forward to Cabinet/Council
	Treasury Management Panel – consider final recommendations to Cabinet in respect of treasury management activity
24 January 2024	Deadline for submission of alternative budget proposals to Financial Services for validation.
24 January 2024	Deadline for preparation of final council budget incorporating final proposals for savings / income and growth from partner organisations.
31 January 2025	Approve final NNDR1 estimate and advise County Council and DLUHC
4 February 2025	Deadline for Cabinet/Council papers on final budget proposal and consultation exercise
4 February 2025	Police & Crime Panel notify level of precept
18 February 2025	Cabinet present final budget proposals including response to consultation exercise
19 February 2025	County Council due to approve budget and set Council Tax level
21 February 2025	Council meet to approve Cheltenham Borough Council budget - approve proposed Cabinet or alternative budget (approved in principal) and the Council tax resolution (includes GCC and police tax)
21 February 2025 – 25 February 2025	Council tax bill processing
26 February 2025 – 7 March 2025	Council tax bills printed/packed
By 14 March 2025	Council Tax Bills to be issued (14 days notice required before first payment - some payments due on 1st April)

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 8th October 2024

Review of Town Centre Floral Arrangements

Accountable member:

Councillor Izaak Tailford - Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm

Accountable officer:

Adam Reynolds - Green Space Manager

Ward(s) affected:

N/A

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

The Council has a long tradition of planting its central green spaces with seasonal bedding plants in the Spring and Summer, as well as installing hanging baskets and window boxes through high footfall areas of the town centre during the summer.

The Council declared a Climate emergency in 2019 and carried a motion earlier this year declaring recognition of the nature emergency and committing, amongst other things, to embed nature's recovery at the heart of all strategic plans, policy areas and decision-making processes.

This report considers the suitability of the current planting strategy in the town centre against these wider corporate and national priorities, and takes into account the savings target set by the Council from its environmental maintenance activities to achieve a balanced budget.

Current planting practices utilise seasonal plants that are not considered favourable in terms of their production costs, benefit to nature, and intensive maintenance requirements.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

1. approves the introduction of an alternative, and permanent perennial-based planting scheme on the Long Gardens;
 2. approves the retention of the existing annual bedding-based planting scheme on Imperial Gardens;
 3. approves 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
 4. agrees to eliminate all window boxes from the Town Hall and Municipal Offices
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1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

The Council will continue to manage its green space assets in an attractive, but more cost-efficient way.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska, ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Changes to the grounds maintenance provisions of the Ubico contract will be required in accordance with the change control provisions within the contract.

Signed off by: One Legal, legal.services@onelegal.com

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

Perennial schemes utilise less water and energy in their production and maintenance. They are far more beneficial to pollinating insects, and contribute to the recovery of nature by maximising the use of the urban green space network. The Climate Assessment Summary Report is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

Signed off by: Maizy McCann, maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

The importance of tackling climate change within Cheltenham is highlighted within the Cheltenham Corporate Plan 2023-2027 which sets out priority objectives for the attainment of carbon-neutrality by 2030. The Corporate Plan, in conjunction with the Climate Impact Assessment Tool can be used collaboratively to ensure the effective delivery of a cleaner, greener and carbon neutral Cheltenham by 2030.

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The change will have little or no impact.

2 Background

2.4 Cheltenham has a proud reputation for high standards of horticultural maintenance and is often referred to as a “town within a park”.

2.5 In 2017, the then cabinet approved a recommendation to start replacing seasonal bedding plant schemes with permanent perennial schemes apart from Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens. This has largely been accomplished with the introduction of many successful planting schemes throughout the town’s parks and green spaces. The response to which has been overwhelmingly positive.

2.6 In July 2019 Cheltenham Borough Council declared a climate emergency. In doing so, Members agreed that greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced to a level which is compatible with keeping global warming below 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. To achieve this reduction, the Council has prepared a Climate Change Strategy (2019) and adopted a target of becoming carbon neutral in its own activities by 2030.

2.7 The Cheltenham Borough Council Climate Impact Assessment Tool has been utilised to consider the climate impact of the current bedding, and hanging basket operation and the summary report forms Appendix 2 of this report.

3 Climate Impacts

3.1 Bedding plants are categorised into Spring and Summer and planted out twice per year, with the old plants dug up and new ones planted in May/June and September/October of each year. The plants cannot be reused and are disposed of by transporting to an allotment site where they are composted. There are approximately 16000 plants bedded out in Imperial Gardens each year and 14000 in the Long Gardens. There are 306 hanging baskets (including the Municipal Offices) and 96 window boxes on the Town Hall and Municipal Offices. The life cycle of a bedding plant is effectively over within one year, which means a large amount of energy is required to germinate 30,000 plants from seed and have them reach full maturity within six months.

3.2 During their production they are sown by specialist seed companies who then sell and transport them to specialist nurseries who grow them on in heated greenhouses ready for transportation to customers. Throughout this process they will require continual heat and water to ensure optimal growing conditions.

3.3 Once delivered to Cheltenham they will be planted out after which continual watering will be required during summer months to keep them in a healthy and colourful condition. Mains water is used to undertake this.

4 Biodiversity and Nature Impacts

4.1 Seasonal Bedding plants have been bred and developed over the years to produce colourful and double headed flowers in order to achieve bright and intensive displays of colour. The result of this in many cases is that little pollen is available to insects and is not easily accessible because of the density of the flowering heads. This is not true of all bedding plants, but generally the ones that are favoured for high impact colour.

5 Maintenance Considerations

5.1 Seasonal bedding schemes, hanging baskets and window troughs require intensive maintenance to produce immaculate displays of colour. This entails having them being dug up and replanted and the ground prepared twice per annum, and in the case of baskets and window boxes transported to our contract grower in south Wales where they are planted, grown on, and transported back to Cheltenham, Continuous watering and dead heading is required to each plant throughout the summer. Failure to undertake watering can quickly lead to wilting and plant loss, so the process has to be kept going at the expense of other desirable activities. Bedding plants are not robust and any that are damaged or squashed generally do not recover, and need replacing.

6 Reasons for recommendations

6.1 Perennial planting represents a style of planting that is better aligned to the Council's climate change aspirations. The planting is largely permanent, and the energy/resources associated with producing and maintaining them is significantly reduced. Some of the plants can be dug up and split over winter to fill gaps or used elsewhere. The water consumption of baskets and window boxes is considerable during the growing season despite the use of self watering containers, as the plants are reliant on continual manual irrigation from a bowser.

6.2 Perennial planting is more beneficial for biodiversity, in particular pollinating insects. The plants are better suited to assist with nature recovery and will help to strengthen the urban habitat by linking green spaces and creating pathways for wildlife and insect to move through the built environment. There is a greater variety of plant material to choose from to provide pollen and nectar sources from early spring to early autumn.

6.3 The change in planting style and reduction in baskets and window boxes will generate annual savings, as set out below, towards the Council target of £500K reduction in spending on environmental services. Following the introduction of the new planting schemes and the smaller number of hanging baskets which will require watering, Ubico will review resource requirements, in conjunction with the digitisation of grounds maintenance services, to identify any time savings which can be realised or diverted to other parts of the service.

Long Garden perennial scheme – plant costs	£14,500
Reduction of Hanging Basket and Window Boxes	£28,500
Reduced water consumption estimated up to	£5000

6.4 Alternative forms of perennial planting have been successfully utilised elsewhere in the town over the past seven years in place of seasonal bedding plants, and feedback has been extremely positive. Making a similar change in the Long Gardens represents the next logical step in the development of Cheltenham's green spaces as well as setting a good example of horticultural practice in a high profile location.

6.5 Ubico grounds maintenance teams have gained sufficient horticultural skill and

experience over the past seven years in order to maintain the proposed new perennial planting to a high standard.

6.6 The same proposal is not proposed for Imperial Garden as the site is utilised for the annual Science Festival in June and Ice rink between November and January. During this time the planting beds are largely covered with event structures making it impossible to establish perennial plants. The planting of seasonal summer bedding plants in July followed by spring plants in February is the only viable planting strategy in this location and will preserve one show piece location for this style of planting in Cheltenham.

6.7 The 95 Cheltenham BID baskets and troughs do not form part of this proposal.

7 Alternative options considered.

7.1 Grassing over the beds would yield larger savings, but damage Cheltenham's horticultural and landscape reputation. There would be no biodiversity gain.

8 Consultation and feedback

8.1 Customer feedback from schemes created in Pittville, Sandford Park, Berkeley and Oxford and Priory Gardens have been extremely positive, as has the response from green space volunteers. Sandford Park was the most recent park to achieve the prestigious national Green Flag Park award in 2022 following the introduction of extensive perennial planting to the Unwins Fountain, and new LINC Garden.

9 Next Steps

9.1 If approved the Council's Green Space Team will devise a planting plan utilising a mixture of herbaceous perennials, evergreen shrubs, grasses and bulbs to create a scheme that maximises both the length of sensory interest, and benefit to pollinating insects.

9.2 Temporary information panels will be displayed on the Long Gardens explaining the proposed new arrangement whilst adjustments are made to the bed pattern to accommodate the new scheme which it is envisaged will be planted in early Spring 2025.

9.3 Adjustments will be made to the nursery contract to reduce seasonal bedding, baskets and containers.

9.4 It is proposed that the remaining 100 baskets be utilised in the town centre to strengthen the urban habitat by linking existing perennial planting schemes between Clarence Fountain, Cambray Place, and John Lewis. Where possible hanging baskets will be planted with flower varieties with open single flower heads that benefit pollinating insects. Spreading them thinly across the entire town will not yield the required saving and have very little visual impact.

9.5 Officers will continue to work with Ubico to review grass management, and alternative maintenance regimes that may generate further savings as part of the review referred to in 6.3 of the report.

10 Key risks

10.1 None

Report author:

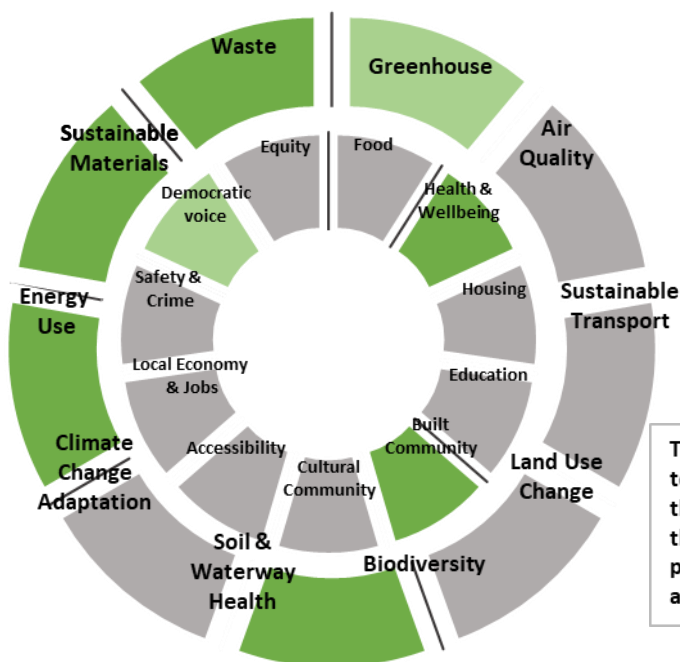
Adam Reynolds – Green Space Manager 01242 264260

Email: adam.reynolds@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. Risk Assessment
2. Climate Change Assessment Tool Summary

Perennial Planting in Long Gardens and reduction of Hanging B



Key

	Significant and/or long-term positive impact identified. No changes needed.
	Slight or short-term positive impact identified. No changes needed but could be reviewed to improve.
	Not applicable or no cause for concern.
	Slight or short-term negative impact identified. Review to identify possible improvements.
	Significant and/or long-term negative impact identified. Changes needed before proceeding.

This summary of the CIAT should be used to aid your decision making. Please note that red/amber segments simply mean that mitigations and changes should take place not that the project cannot go ahead.

Environmental	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
GHGs	2	Once the planting scheme has been transitioned to perennials the reductions in resources used to produce and maintain the annual plants will be saved in all future years	0
Air quality	0	There will be no impact in air quality changing from one style of planting to another	0
Sustainable Transport	0	This is a landscape project	0
Land use change	0	The land use remains amenity / landscape	0
Biodiversity	8	Perennial plants are more beneficial to pollinating insects than seasonal bedding plants, and the Long Garden will enhance and better connect the urban habitat network	0
Soil and waterway health	0	There will be no change in land use	0
Climate Change Adaptation	4	The plant selection will take account of the changing climate and utilise plant species that require less irrigation and can cope with extended spells of dry weather. The scheme has the potential to act as a showpiece of good practice in a high-profile location	0

Energy Use	8	Once established permanent ground there will little or no energy costs associated with producing seasonal bedding plants annually in heated green houses, significant reductions in irrigation water, and transportation costs between seed house germination, nursery and end customer.	0
Sustainable Materials	8	Energy costs associated with the production of perennial plants are encountered only once in their initial production unlike seasonal bedding plants which are twice annually. Similarly material resources, such as compost and pots are only used only once. The Long Garden currently utilises 14000 plant containers, albeit they are sent back to be recycled or reused if possible	0
Waste	#VALUE!	The current practice requires all the plants to be dug up and disposed of twice per annum, albeit they are transported to a Cheltenham allotment site where tenants can reuse them as compost or soil conditioner. Plants in the new scheme will remain in the ground and will not be required to be dug up and disposed of. Some of the herbaceous material will die back and need removing from site, where it will also be composted.	0

Social	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
Food	0	This is an amenity landscape scheme	0
Health	4	The Long Gardens contribute significantly to the quality of green infrastructure in the town. Access to and interaction with good quality green space (particularly semi-natural), are proven to benefit peoples mental well being	0
Housing	0	This is an amenity landscape scheme	0
Education	0	The perennial scheme could serve as an exemplar scheme showcasing good sustainable horticultural practices	0
Community	4	The Long Garden	0
Culture	0	People will still be able to experience and enjoy the visual impact of the Long Gardens as a free and accessible public amenity	0
Accessibility	0	People will still be able to experience and enjoy the visual impact of the Long Gardens as a free and accessible public amenity	0

<p>Local Economy and Jobs</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Part of the attraction to visitors with prized green spaces set amongst Georgian architecture. The Long Gardens will continue to be an important piece of the green space network at the centre of the town. Loss of hanging baskets and window boxes may be viewed as a loss to environmental quality where they are no longer hung out</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Well maintained public spaces are known to deter vandalism and anti-social behaviour due to the implied attention they receive from maintenance teams and the many people that frequent them</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Equity</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>The Long Gardens will remain accessible for everyone to enjoy in an accessible, and central location close to a central transport hub</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Democratic Voice</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Previous engagement with green space volunteer groups has generated support for this style of planting. The last customer survey undertaken by the Council indicated high levels of satisfaction with Cheltenham's parks, and indicated support for nature-based approaches to garden maintenance</p>	<p>0</p>

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Perennial Planting in Long Gardens and reduction of Hanging Baskets



Key

	Significant and/or long-term positive impact identified. No changes needed.
	Slight or short-term positive impact identified. No changes needed but could be reviewed to improve.
	Not applicable or no cause for concern.
	Slight or short-term negative impact identified. Review to identify possible improvements.
	Significant and/or long-term negative impact identified. Changes needed before proceeding.

This summary of the CIAT should be used to aid your decision making. Please note that red/amber segments simply mean that mitigations and changes should take place not that the project cannot go ahead.

Environmental	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
GHGs	2	Once the planting scheme has been transitioned to perennials the reductions in resources used to produce and maintain the annual plants	0
Air quality	0	There will be no impact in air quality changing from one style of planting to another	0
Sustainable Transport	0	This is a landscape project	0
Land use change	0	The land use remains amenity / landscape	0
Biodiversity	8	Perennial plants are more beneficial to pollinating insects than seasonal bedding plants, and the Long Garden will enhance and better connect the urban habitat network	0
Soil and waterway health	0	There will be no change in land use	0
Climate Change Adaptation	4	The plant selection will take account of the changing climate, and utilise plant species that require less irrigation and can cope with extended spells of dry weather. The scheme has the potential to act as a showpiece of good practice in a high profile location	0

Energy Use	8	Once plants are established permanently in the ground there will little or no energy costs associated with producing seasonal bedding plants annually in heated green houses, significant reductions in irrigation water, and transportation costs between seed house germination, nursery and end customer.	0
Sustainable Materials	8	Energy costs associated with the production of perennial plants are encountered only once in their initial production unlike seasonal bedding plants which are twice annually. Similarly material resources, such as compost and pots are only used only once. The Long Garden currently utilises 14000 plant containers, albeit they are sent back to be recycled or reused if possible	0
Waste	#VALUE!	The current practice requires all the plants to be dug up and disposed of twice per annum, albeit they are transported to a Cheltenham allotment site where tenants can reuse them as compost or soil conditioner. Plants in the new scheme will remain in the ground, and will not be required to be dug up and disposed of. Some of the herbaceous material will die back and need removing from site, where it will also be composted.	0

Social	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
Food	0	This is an amenity landscape scheme	0
Health	4	The Long Gardens contribute significantly to the quality of green infrastructure in the town. Access to and interaction with good quality green space (particularly semi-natural), are proven to benefit peoples mental well being	0
Housing	0	This is an amenity landscape scheme	0
Education	0	The perennial scheme could serve as an exemplar scheme showcasing good sustainable horticultural practices	0
Community	4	The Long Garden	0

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Culture	0	People will still be able to experience and enjoy the visual impact of the Long Gardens as a free and accessible public amenity	0
Accessibility	0	People will still be able to experience and enjoy the visual impact of the Long Gardens as a free and accessible public amenity	0
Local Economy and Jobs	0	Part of Cheltenham's attraction to visitors is it's environmental quality with prized green spaces set amongst Georgian architecture. The Long Gardens will continue to be an important piece of the green space network at the centre of the town. Loss of hanging baskets and window boxes may be viewed as a loss to environmental quality where they are no longer hung out	0
Safety	0	Well maintained public spaces are known to deter vandalism and anti social behaviour due to the implied attention they receive from maintenance teams and the many people that frequent them	0
Equity	0	The Long Gardens will remain accessible for everyone to enjoy in an accessible, and central location close to a central transport hub	0
Democratic Voice	2	Previous engagement with green space volunteer groups has generated support for this style of planting. The last customer survey undertaken by the Council indicated high levels of satisfaction with Cheltenham's parks, and indicated support for nature based approaches to garden maintenance	0

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Introduction

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is a method for assessing the effects or impacts of a council policy or function on removing barriers to equality.

The Equality Act 2010 includes a public sector equality duty which requires public authorities to try and eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it and promote equality and good relations across a range of protected characteristics.

The protected characteristics are:

Age	Disability	Gender Reassignment
Marriage and civil partnership	Pregnancy and maternity	Race
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)	Sex	Sexual orientation

An EqIA should be completed with the full range of protected characteristics considered during the initial stages of developing new strategies, policies, functions or services, prior to starting a procurement exercise and before decisions are made.

Examples of when an EqIA should be completed are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any proposals to introduce or add to a service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any proposals to adopt policy priorities, strategies and plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any proposals to remove, reduce or alter a service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Changes to staffing structure where groups of employees are likely to be negatively affected
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any new policies or changes to policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any proposals in relation to procured or commissioned services

Stage 1 - Equality Screening

Whenever a policy/service or function is reviewed, changed, developed or removed an initial equality impact assessment stage 1 will need to be undertaken. This is a screening template and will help establish whether a full assessment is needed. This should be done at an early stage of the process so that it is part of policy development.

Stage 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

This is the full EqIA and seeks to identify the equality considerations that have been taken into account including any mitigating actions proposed and ensures decisions are based on evidence. The EqIA will need to be agreed with the appropriate Head of Service or Director and should be included on the decision making report, along with commentary on the assessment in the main body of the report.

1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

a. Person responsible for this EqIA	
Officer responsible: Adam Reynolds	Service Area: Green Space
Title: Green Space Manager	Date of assessment: 05-09-2024
Signature:	

b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?	Service
--	---------

c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project	
Review of floral arrangements in town centre	
Is this new or existing?	Already exists and is being reviewed
Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project	

d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?	
Aims:	To replace annual seasonal bedding with perennial planting in the long gardens. To reduce the number of hanging baskets put out from 306 to 100, and to stop putting out window boxes on the town hall and municipal offices
Objectives:	Cabinet approval of recommendations to change from annual bedding scheme on Long Gardens to perennial scheme and reduction to hanging baskets and window boxes
Outcomes:	The long garden is planted with a more sustainable perennial planting scheme of high visual quality. Hanging baskets and window boxes are reduced from 2025 onwards
Benefits:	A perennial scheme in the Long Gardens fits better with the Council’s aspiration to reduce carbon, and address the nature crisis. Coupled with a reduction in hanging baskets and window boxes costs it will help achieve the council’s savings target of £500K from environmental service spending

e. What are the expected impacts?

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.

No

Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?

No impact expected

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

Largely positive in climate change and biodiversity aspects, but may be some negativity around reducing numbers of hanging baskets and window boxes

If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.

f. Identify next steps as appropriate

Stage Two required

No

Owner of Stage Two assessment

Completion date for Stage Two assessment

Please forward this completed form to [add email address] and move on to Stage 2 if required.

2. Engagement and consultation

The best approach to find out if a policy etc, is likely to impact positively or negatively on equality groups is to look at existing research, previous consultation recommendations, studies or consult with representatives of those equality groups.

a. Research and evidence

List below any data, consultations (previous, relevant, or future planned), or any relevant research, studies or analysis that you have considered to assess the policy, function, strategy, service change or project for its relevance to equality.

b. Consultation

Has any consultation be conducted?	Choose an item.
------------------------------------	-----------------

Describe the consultation or engagement you have conducted or are intending to conduct. Describe who was consulted, what the outcome of the activity was and how these results have influenced the development of the strategy, policy, project, service change or budget option.
If no consultation or engagement is planned, please explain why.

--

3. Assessment

a. Assessment of impacts

For each characteristic, please indicate the type of impact (positive – contributes to promoting equality or improving relations within an equality group, neutral – no impact, negative – could disadvantage them).

Please use the description of impact box to explain how you justify the impact and include any data and evidence that you have collected from surveys, performance data or complaints to support your proposed changes

Protected Characteristic	Specific Characteristic	Impact	Description of impact	Mitigating Action
AGE	Older people (60+)	Choose an item.		
	Younger People (16-25)	Choose an item.		
	Children (0-16)	Choose an item.		
DISABILITY A definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 is available here . <i>See also carer responsibilities under other considerations.</i>	Physical disability	Choose an item.		
	Sensory Impairment (sight, hearing)	Choose an item.		
	Mental health	Choose an item.		
	Learning Disability	Choose an item.		
GENDER REASSIGNMENT MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP		Choose an item.		
	Women	Choose an item.		
	Men	Choose an item.		
	Lesbians	Choose an item.		
	Gay Men	Choose an item.		
PREGNANCY & MATERNITY	Women	Choose an item.		
RACE* Further information on the breakdown below each of these headings, is available here . For example Asian, includes Chinese, Pakistani and Indian etc	White	Choose an item.		
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	Choose an item.		
	Asian	Choose an item.		
	African	Choose an item.		

	Caribbean or Black	Choose an item.		
		Choose an item.		
RELIGION & BELIEF** A list of religions used in the census is available here	See note	Choose an item.		
SEX (GENDER)	Men	Choose an item.		
	Women	Choose an item.		
	Trans Men	Choose an item.		
	Trans Women			
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heterosexual	Choose an item.		
	Lesbian	Choose an item.		
	Gay	Choose an item.		
	Bisexual/Pansexual	Choose an item.		
Other considerations				
Socio-economic factors (income, education, employment, community safety & social support)		Choose an item.		
Rurality i.e. access to services; transport; education; employment; broadband		Choose an item.		
Other (e.g. caring responsibilities)		Choose an item.		

* To keep the form concise, race has not been included as an exhaustive list, please augment the list above where appropriate to reflect the complexity of other racial identities.

** There are too many faith groups to provide a list, therefore, please input the faith group e.g. Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Hindus, etc. Consider the different faith groups individually when considering positive or negative impacts. A list of religions in the census is available [here](#)

4. Outcomes, Action and Public Reporting Page 39

a. Please list the actions identified through the evidence and the mitigating action to be taken.

Action	Target completion date	Lead Officer

b. Public reporting

All completed EqIA's are required to be publicly available on the Council's website once they have been signed off. EqIA's are also published with the papers for committee and full council decisions.

Please send completed EqIA's to [email address]

5. Monitoring outcomes, evaluation and review

The Equalities Impact Assessment is not an end in itself but the start of a continuous monitoring and review process. The relevant Service or Lead Officer responsible for the delivery of the policy, function or service change is also responsible for monitoring and reviewing the EqIA and any actions that may be taken to mitigate impacts.

Individual services are responsible for conducting the impact assessment for their area, staff from Corporate Policy and Governance will be available to provide support and guidance, please email xxxx if you have any questions.

6. Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change

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