

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet - Minutes

Meeting date: 17 December 2024

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.00 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets and Deputy S151 Officer), Paul Hardiman (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Manager), Martin Stacy (Housing Strategy and Partnerships Manager) and Ewan Wright

1 Apologies

Councillor Victoria Atherstone sent her apologies.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2024 were approved and signed as a correct record.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were none.

5 Housing Revenue Account Revised Forecast 2024-25 and Interim Budget Proposals 2025-26 for consultation

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced her report which, following the transition of housing services back to Cheltenham Borough Council, highlights opportunities to make effective efficiency choices, and investment in improving housing stock and in local community projects. These will ensure that standards are raised to the highest level across the housing portfolio, from stakeholders to tenants to shared owners. She said it highlights potential growth opportunities, with spare funds to re-invest in homes for the first time in many years.

The Leader agreed that these first HRA interim budget proposals to be put forward since CBH was welcomed back in house are exciting, and encouraged as many Members and members of the public as possible to provide feedback.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the interim HRA budget proposals for 2025/26 (shown at Appendix 2) are approved for consultation, including a proposed rent increase of 2.7% and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within the report;**
- 2. the proposed HRA capital programme is approved for consultation as shown at Appendix 3 and the detailed capital programme in Appendix 4;**
- 3. the revised HRA forecast for 2024/25 is noted;**
- 4. following the publication of the Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement, authority is delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for public consultation;**
- 5. consultation responses are sought by 31 January 2025.**

6 General Fund Revenue & Capital - Interim Budget Proposals 2025-26 for consultation

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that she had discarded her original budget speech, predicated on the idea that the budget set for the next year would underpin the long-term financial future of Cheltenham, following the recent publication of the government's English Devolution White Paper.

She said she had come into local government believing it to be one of the most worthwhile forms of public service, based on the belief that the future of their town and the country as a whole could be brilliant when people give their time, talents and local knowledge to paving the way for that future. Long-term plans for local government have been made secure in the knowledge that when one councillor could no longer carry the mantle, someone else would follow.

This is why the budget now needs different framing in the current context. In one unfortunate stroke from central government, the council's role in safeguarding the

money that Cheltenham has been granted through years of wise investment and careful management has fundamentally changed, and we have no choice as a council but to make the best decisions we can for our remaining lifespan – without knowing how long that might be. We may be in the last years where decisions about Cheltenham's future and how it spends its money are made in Cheltenham, by the people who know the town best. She said that decisions made now will set how decades of careful financial management and investment strategies play out over the next few years.

She reminded Members that the paper is a consultative document, and there may be some changes over the festive period while officers work out how to ensure that every last penny is invested for Cheltenham's long-term future. The budget is a prudent plan for long-term recovery, creating breathing space, room for innovation and smart choices, and space to make the decisions to ensure the long-term future carries on in the way liberals and those who believe in local democracy believe it should. Officers and Members know that doing the right thing is expensive but are confident that they will find a way; the budget proposals are the pinnacle of how we have managed to do so much with so little to date, and plan to do more.

She ended by commending the budget to Members, and thanking officers who have spent years ensuring that Cheltenham has the budget to do everything it can.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery agreed with everything the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said, noting that the government's white paper was currently being analysed throughout the country, and thought that by the end of the consultation period, we may have a better understanding of its implications. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets agreed, but said the principle is that this is Cheltenham's money, and we will do everything we can to ensure it is spent on and for Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture welcomed the report, saying that Cheltenham had been self-governing for well over 200 years, and we need to be careful about the messages we send to central government and the care taken of local assets. He was pleased to note that three largely discretionary areas are protected – place marketing, local businesses, and Cheltenham's wonderful festivals, theatres, and heritage buildings. Management of finances, resources and investment decisions has always been sensible and wise, allowing for some sensible discretionary spending from people who know the local situation, and it is worrying to think that local government reorganisation will disturb the balance and lead to worse decision-making. He is pleased that this issue has been addressed in public.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services agreed, saying it is important that people understand how much the council cares for local residents, the assets it has built up over the years, and how it is able to spend in a way people want – for example on culture, No Child Left Behind, and buildings – all important for the people of Cheltenham and in supporting local communities. She noted that commercialisation of the council in recent years had been a significant tool in building the resources we have, and said she was always delighted to share information about our successes with colleagues across Europe.

She thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for the presentation, which demonstrates in an understandable way what and how CBC is able to do what it does.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the interim budget proposals for consultation including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council are approved. The proposed Council tax for 2025/26 represents an increase of 2.99% a year for a Band D property, subject to the publication and consultation on the Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement;**
- 2. the schedule of target savings and income generation at Appendix 3 is noted;**
- 3. the growth proposals at Appendix 4 are approved;**
- 4. the proposed capital programme at Appendix 6, as outlined in Section 13 is approved;**
- 5. following the publication of the Local Government Provisional Finance Settlement, authority is delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for public consultation;**
- 6. consultation responses to be received by 31 January 2025.**

7 Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Collaboration Agreement

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit team invests huge amounts of time and effort cross-county in tackling these issues, and it is particularly important for the discretionary services offered by the council that programmes such as this exist, to help protect vulnerable residents across the town. She welcomed the report and agreement, which is a continuation of what has gone before, and hoped that Members would back the recommendation.

The Leader confirmed that this report is brought to Cabinet every year with minor tweaks and updates, but is a really important part of what we do. She was very glad that the work is managed in-house, and said that sharing the team with other authorities is more effective than doing it alone.

RESOLVED THAT

- **the council's entry to the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Partnership Collaboration Agreement is approved.**

8 First Homes Technical Advice Note

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services began by thanking officers Martin Stacy and Ewan Wright for their work on this report over a period time. She said the paper is an advice note for developers, advising them on how CBC regards the differences between potential homes they may provide, in relation to first homes, shared ownership – our preference – and other areas. She confirmed that if any issues arise and changes need to be made in the next year or so, she will report back to Cabinet, in consultation with officers.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture welcomed the reiteration of CBC's policy on what the split of affordable housing should be, and agrees that while not very much can be done with the First Homes scheme, it is right that we put strong emphasis (75%) on affordable housing being social housing for rent. This is the view of the party both locally and nationally, as there are areas of Cheltenham, such as Leckhampton, where the affordability gap is enormous between what young people can afford and what the local housing market can offer. He welcomed this important part of the report and the emphasis of the policy, as well as the back-up advice for developers if first homes are appropriate.

The Leader also thanked officers for their work, aware of the huge amount of time involved and many changes that had to be made.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the First Homes Technical Advice Note (TAN) as set out in Appendix 3 is approved;**
- 2. approves setting a £175 administration fee per dwelling to be charged by CBC to developers in respect of the initial sale of First Homes, and to vendors in respect of resales is approved;**
- 3. authority is delegated to the Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager to undertake any minor updates to the First Homes TAN (including the administration fee) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.**

9 To approve CBC's Fencing, Hedgerow and Boundary Policy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said this policy aims to help tenants look after their hedgerows, ensure fences are not too high, and deal with any fencing or boundary issues arising with private owners in neighbouring

properties. She said not only is it good that we can offer tenants this assistance, but also that Cheltenham will look better in some areas, and homes for hedgehogs and other wildlife will be provided.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Fencing Policy is approved;**
- 2. a review of the policy in one year is noted;**
- 3. a request is made that, during the review period, officers carry out the actions set out in 5.2 of this report.**

10 Approval for publication of this year's Infrastructure Funding Statement and CIL Rate Summary Statement

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said that the council has a statutory legal obligation to publish both the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement and CIL Rate Summary Statement, and that this must be presented in an agreed way, in collaboration with strategic and local partners. He said the first meeting to make allocations from the pooled strategic monies will take place on 30 January, and work will be undertaken with other infrastructure providers to identify priorities that could be supported by the CIL Joint Committee.

He directed Members to a useful summary about receipts and allocations (i.e. funding agreed and given but not necessarily spent yet), noting that up to 5% is allocated to administration, up to 15% to parished areas (five in Cheltenham), and 15% to neighbourhood projects, leaving a strategic pot of 70% (currently showing at 80% because no bids have been submitted yet from some parts of the community).

Turning to the CIL Rate Summary statement, this is also a regulatory requirement based on the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors CIL Index, and details money passed to parish councils, non-parished areas of the borough, and S106 money allocated mainly for affordable housing, plus two other items. There is also a list of projects requesting CIL funding, across all three areas of the partnership.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets thanked the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control for an interesting report and wondered if it would be possible to have a summary sheet of CIL funding so far, making it clear where money came in and went out. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control felt that this had been provided in the past, and said he would ask the team to provide one.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture confirmed that this has been produced in the past, as the government-prescribed format is opaque and can be difficult to follow. He said the Infrastructure Funding Statements contains a lot of important information; he welcomed the detail of CIL funding of projects in unparished areas – including the Bath Road Utility Boxes, defibrillators,

and Honeybourne Honey – but noted that there was no detail about projects at parish level. He said this had been included in the past and was not sure why it was not included here. He also said it would be good to have a report on the actual expenditure, rather than just the money allocated, and added, in the interest of transparency, that he is a member of Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said that the requirement is to show money allocated rather than spent, but agreed that that information would improve communication – a breakdown of where the money had been spent in the parished areas as well as the neighbourhoods. He undertook to bring this back to Members.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the publication of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) relating to the financial year ending 31 March 2024 by 31 December 2024 is approved;**
- 2. the Annual CIL Rate Summary Statement will be published alongside it by the 31 December 2024 is noted.**

11 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to share any briefings.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture congratulated the Everyman Theatre on the launch of its pantomime, *Aladdin*, starring Tweedy the Clown. He said it is great to have a major regional theatre in Cheltenham, which also runs some important social programmes.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services shared the following:

- she has attended a couple of European meetings in the last few weeks, one of which included a good discussion of culture and how to utilise this to bring young people together to build better communities. She was happy to be able to share all that Cheltenham does;
- many European councils do not view themselves as commercial entities, and it was good to show that it can be done and can make a significant difference;
- in Leeds, at a meeting of the French Forum – which included ministers, two ambassadors, senior officers and a number of councillors - it was interesting to hear what goes on elsewhere and share what is done in Cheltenham. Of particular note was:
 - a national music day in France, on 21 June, where all types of musicians and singers participate at all levels. She suggested looking at this as a cross-Europe event, and would love Cheltenham to take a lead;
 - bringing together all the organisations, including the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and Euro Cities – comprising 41 countries and one million councillors – to exchange good practice, work together on European and other legislative interests. Together they could develop a European focus for work, as a group, providing strength and support. This

could provide another opportunity for Cheltenham to take the lead through the Local Government Association, and shouldn't be missed.

The Cabinet Member for Major Projects and Housing Development had nothing specific, but thanked all his teams for their hard work in complex and busy areas – the Golden Valley Development team and HBD have been working feverishly all year, as have other teams across the council, including housing delivery.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency reported on a recent visit to Bournside School where a ground source heat pump is being installed to warm and cool Gloucestershire's largest secondary school. He was impressed by the vision and commitment of the school's head, Steve Jeffries, and the governors, investing in technology to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, reduce CO2 emissions, and save money for the school. This contrasts with GCC's rejection of his suggestion to incorporate a ground source heat pump at the new Leckhampton high school, and he trusts that in future, every new-build school in the county will incorporate low-carbon heating systems as standard.

The Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling and Public Realm raised two matters:

- a new tree sponsorship scheme has been launched at the Cemetery on Bouncers Lane. This type of memorial has traditionally been offered in public parks, but space has largely run out, and it is felt that the Cemetery is a good alternative, a nice, peaceful place to commemorate loved ones;
- waste and recycling collection over the festive period is being done differently this year, with collections from 25, 26 and 27 December rescheduled as bumper collections on 8, 9 and 10 January. This trial, primarily done so that the teams can have a proper break over Christmas, should help get collections back to normal sooner than previously, and he looks forward to the feedback.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control also thanked the dedicated and professional officers in his teams, who have been very busy, with new papers and updates almost every week this year. He said have been some major recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, with new housing targets in Cheltenham, and has asked the team to provide a policy briefing note to explain the changes, once they have had chance to analyse them fully.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reminded everyone that the budget consultation will be open throughout the festive period, offering the chance to have a say on how council tax is spent, particularly important as we head towards a new phase of local government. She thanked the finance and assets team, and also officers in Revenue and Benefits, OneLegal and the huge network of people who help the council manage its finances.

The Leader said it had been a real privilege to represent Cheltenham locally and nationally at many different events over the year; it is clear that CBC is getting it right in many ways, in particular management of the races and the Golden Valley Development. She took the opportunity to reflect on all that the administration had achieved throughout the year and some challenges to come:

- welcoming housing colleagues back in house involved a great deal of work from many people, including residents, tenants and lease holders, whose ongoing input in the newly-formed housing committee will be essential in driving the service. She thanked officers who had helped with the transition, in particular the Chief Executive;
- the local elections in May and general election in July brought fantastic results for the LibDems, and she is pleased to be working with an MP of the same party, whose job is to do what he believes to be right for the people of Cheltenham;
- there have been a lot of issues round the Minster Exchange, but she is proud to say it is now officially open, 75% occupied, and a lovely place to work, alongside the refurbished Minster Gardens;
- Cheltenham is lucky to have such amazing parks and gardens, and has been awarded accolades for these, as well as for keeping people safe during race week and for its night-time economy;
- thanks to officers and Members for rising to the occasion when unexpected events occur, such as the fire in Regent Arcade, where a senior officer was out directing traffic;
- we are lucky to have received £20m from the government in support of the next step in the journey to delivering the innovation centre;
- officers are not only committed to but have also helped raise £1500 for charities, and donated 400 selection boxes which were delivered to local communities before Christmas;
- changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will bring challenges, and it is important that we work with our strategic national partners;
- regarding the newly-published government white paper, while we might not agree with the proposal, we should be thankful that the government is at least being clear about the direction of travel and approximate timelines, and take the opportunity to get on the journey, be swift with our early decision-making and, when the time comes, be able to reach a consensus which is best for the county;
- following a small loss last year, the council took the brave decision to bring back the ice rink in Imperial Gardens, and it is proving a huge hit, bringing many additional visitors to town with enormous benefits to local businesses. It has a new look this year, with trees and lights, and also relaxed glide sessions for those with sensory issues.

She congratulated Cheltenham Town women's football team for reaching the fourth round of the FA Cup for the first time in their history, and ended with a round of thanks:

- to all officers, some of whom will be working over the festive period;
- to all Cabinet Members, for their commitment and dedication throughout the year;
- to the Senior Leadership Team – a force to be reckoned with, who will be sure to seize the opportunity of change to local government to get the very best for Cheltenham.

12 Cabinet Member decisions since the last meeting

03 December 2024: Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

[Award of contract for kerb-side sort recycling vehicles](#)

These vehicles will expand even further the range of kerbside recycling options in Cheltenham, to include soft plastics and tetrapacks, ahead of government targets for 2027.

17 December 2024: Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

[To approve exceptions to the council tax premiums on empty homes and second homes from April 2025](#)

This decision makes minor alterations to the ambitious scheme previously launched to raise additional council tax on long-term empty properties and second homes, following central government's decision to establish policy on these.