

Cheltenham Borough Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 31 March 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.00 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Jackie Chelin (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Julia Chandler, Chris Day, Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp and Richard Pineger

Also in attendance:

Victoria Bishop (Governance, Risk and Assurance Manager), Lisa Edgar (Cheltenham Trust), Philippa Turner (Cheltenham Trust) and Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships), Councillor Martin Horwood (Cabinet Member Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Holliday, Joy and Smith

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair chaired the meeting.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February were approved and signed as a correct record.

4 Public and Member questions, calls for actions and petitions

There were none.

5 Cabinet Briefing

In the absence of the Leader, the Deputy Leader confirmed there was little to report to scrutiny on this occasion, albeit the Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Public Realm had asked to inform scrutiny that the Household Recycling Centre work was ongoing. He was awaiting an end of project report which will provide detailed data, including booking data from Wingmoor farm. The Cabinet Member had met with partners and they were considering potential waste collections at kerbside and disposal options. Scrutiny would have the opportunity to consider a report in due course.

6 Feedback from other scrutiny meetings attended

There were no questions, but the Chair advised that a new Teams channel had been set up with the nominated representatives to ensure questions raised by O&S could be responded to efficiently.

Members were reminded that they could raise issues with the representatives at any time.

7 Matters referred to committee

There were no matters referred to O&S.

8 Updates from scrutiny task groups

There are no active scrutiny task groups.

9 Interim Collections Development Policy 2025-2027

The Head of Communities, Wellbeing & Partnerships introduced the item and explained that the collections policy had last been reviewed in 2019. Best practice was to review it every 5 years and the council was keen to approve this new policy to confirm the governance for collections going forward.

That said this would be an interim policy for two years due to the ongoing Big Museum project which was an opportunity for communities to engage with the Wilson and have their say on the future direction of the museum. The Collections Policy would then be reviewed and rewritten to reflect what the consultation had fed back.

The Cabinet Member would be taking this report to Cabinet on 8 April and any views from O&S would be fed back to Cabinet verbally due to the timings of publication of the Cabinet report.

The Head of Communities, Wellbeing & Partnerships took the opportunity to thank the Curatorial Manager and the Head of Culture for all their work to date. It was vital

that the right levels of governance were in place to address any potential reputational hazards. They did an amazing job in the face of financial constraints and staff and storage capacity.

The Head of Culture at the Wilson, provided the context to the policy. The Big Museum Project which comprises community consultations, a test space and outreach provides the Wilson with the opportunity to rethink and renew all its programmes. The museum attracted 300 visitors a day and the number of participants in the learning and engagement programmes amounted to 52,000 last year. This included individuals, communities and schools across the region.

Feedback collected throughout the year within the Test Space and mobile stations will contribute to the design, curation, and interpretation of the new museum.

She highlighted that the collections development policy was critical for Arts Council accreditation. The draft interim policy has been updated to ensure it is compliant, but the Trust wishes to be more ambitious and informed by communities. The data from the big museum project will be considered and future proof the collection in terms of strengthening the museum's position in terms of fundraising and investment.

In response to questions from Members, the following responses were given :

- As a direct result of the consultation, the Wilson will be intending to create a more dynamic display policy going forward
- The decolonisation agenda is quite challenging across UK museums. The Wilson does not have any objects of immediate concern but the approach is a methodical one, object by object. A great deal of research and scrutiny has been undertaken in terms of the collection and the Wilson has been working in consultation with Oxford, Liverpool and the national museum of world culture collections. Repatriating items would present an opportunity to forge new international links.
- Through the Big Museum project local audiences will have their say on how they see such objects sitting within the museum; it was very much a consultative process.
- Inevitably, not every one of the 250 000 objects can be displayed in the museum, but it is important that a representative sample is on public display. All objects are made accessible for research purposes.
- Once storage is improved and better spaces are created, the collection will be prioritised and 'brought to life'.
- Much of the collection is being digitised to enable a better online experience for all.
- There is currently a moratorium on donations due to storage challenges. By making space through the rationalisation of the collection there can be a more ambitious acquisitions policy. This will enable the museum to present more of a sense of the past through heritage to local communities so things are collected which are relevant to people today.

- The structure of the collections policy has been developed by the Arts Council and adapted accordingly. It represents a living, working document. The collection impact form asks a series of questions, including cost and storage, to ensure due diligence is done when accepting items.

The Cabinet Member Economic Development, Wellbeing & Culture thanked the Cheltenham Trust for the detailed work being undertaken. He welcomed the strategic approach to collections, which also opens up the opportunity to look at what can be rationalised in terms of what is potentially of low cultural value and not being strongly connected to Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member wished to highlight Tram 21, Cheltenham's last tram and the only one of its kind. Options were being considered to safeguard its future. Converting it back to a working tram was not realistic in the medium term and it was too big for the Wilson. The recommendation is to move towards deaccessioning it subject to a considered plan. Bringing it out of storage would enable its story to be told, even if it is converted to another use.

The Chair thanked representatives from the Wilson for their work and attending the meeting.

10 Review of scrutiny work plan 2025/26

Members considered the workplan and suggested that whilst the safeguarding of women and girls was important and the council was playing a role in addressing this, there was also a growing problem for young men in society, particularly around online influences. Deradicalisation in general is incredibly important, particularly for men in what can be a toxic environment online. It was recognised that the council provides support to third parties such as community, charity and religious organisations and there is work the council can do in terms of supporting education and education initiatives. A Member noted the work that the Police and Crime Commissioner was doing in terms of actively going into schools to talk about these issues. Recognising that education and crime were under different auspices, the committee would welcome a briefing note outlining support that does exist for this respect. **Action – Dem Services**

11 Any other item that the Chair determines to be urgent

None.

12 Date of next meeting

19 May 2025

13 Briefing note

Whilst the content of the briefing note was not for discussion, Members wished to put on record the following points :

- Environment Agency data on actual carbon emissions was not included in the briefing note as the EA is not required to report until next year. A member had obtained the statistics for 2021/22 which were as follows : 179.000 t Co2 produced and Javelin Park was 1 of 56 active incinerators with 18 more under construction.
- Reports from industry suggest that incinerators emit less carbon than landfill sites although landfill technology was already cutting down on emissions, for example, methane is captured and turned into energy, and most councils compost food waste. Both were current working solutions. Landfill also stored carbon better.
- Energy from waste required a 2-3 year development control order process which local councils had little control over; it was all about carbon capture and utilisation.
- Whilst the Environmental Partnerships Manager had offered to host an information session on the issues, Members acknowledged that the priority was to increase recycling rates further in order to avert waste going to the incinerator.