

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 12 May 2025

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 3.15 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Paul Baker (Chair), Dr David Willingham (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Julia Chandler, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Hannah Healy, Sandra Holliday, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Cathal Lynch, Ben Orme, Dr Helen Pemberton, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities) and Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Beale, Chelin, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Joy, Oliver and Pineger.

2 Communications by the retiring Mayor

The outgoing Mayor reported on some of the recent events:

- the presentation of a long-service award to Simon Stanley, who has worked at the Depot for 50 years, since leaving school. He congratulated him and several other very long-standing staff members, thanking them for all they do for the town, and commenting that their long service also reflects well on the council as an employer;

- he and the Lady Mayor spent a lovely afternoon at Buckingham Palace, where they met the Mayor of Gloucester and two trustees from Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees, who recently received a King's Award for Voluntary Service;
- together with visitors from Annecy and Gottingen, he attended the recent Jazz Festival, always a wonderful event in the town's calendar. It was good to welcome them and strengthen twinning links, with a good exchange of ideas demonstrating the importance of these international relationships. He thanked Richard Gibson and Cheltenham International Partnerships for their work, which he hopes will continue to thrive;
- he had the pleasure of attending World Tai Chi Day at Pittville Pump Room, a spiritual dance and movement event, which was both therapeutic and enjoyable;
- Whaddon Road recently hosted the Under-17 finals in the Cheltenham League, which covers a very wide area, and is testament to the organisers and people who run the league, putting in an incredible amount of work to keep it growing where other leagues are collapsing.

He ended by saying he had thoroughly enjoyed his time as Mayor, and that Cheltenham is a wonderful town because of its people. He thanked everyone for a memorable year.

3 Election of Mayor 2025-26 (Chair of Council)

The Mayor called on Councillor Atherstone to move the motion proposing Councillor Willingham as the new Mayor. Councillor Boyes was happy to formally second the motion.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT:

Councillor Dr David Willingham be, and is hereby, elected Mayor of the Borough of Cheltenham and Council Chair for the ensuing Municipal Year.

The out-going Mayor congratulated Councillor Willingham on his appointment and invited him to take over the chair.

The Chief Executive asked the newly-elected Mayor to sign a declaration of acceptance of the office of Council Chair 2025-26.

4 Election of Deputy Mayor 2025-26 (Vice-Chair of Council)

The newly-elected Mayor invited the Leader, Councillor Hay, to propose Councillor Martin Horwood as Deputy Mayor for the upcoming municipal year. The motion was formally seconded by Councillor Davies.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT:

Councillor Martin Horwood be, and is hereby, elected Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Cheltenham and Council Vice Chair for the ensuing Municipal Year.

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Horwood on his appointment and invited him to take his seat.

The Chief Executive asked the newly-elected Deputy Mayor to sign a declaration of acceptance of the office of Council Vice-Chair 2025-26.

5 Declarations of interest

There were none.

6 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on:

- 21 February 2025
- 17 March 2025

were approved as a true record, and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

7 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor began by thanking Councillor Baker for his year as Cheltenham's Mayor and for all the good work he had done. He said it had been a pleasure to work with him, and that he would be a hard act to follow.

He went on to share the following communications:

- congratulations and welcome to Councillor Healy, who was elected to represent Charlton Kings ward on 01 May;
- congratulations too to all councillors who were elected to Gloucestershire County Council on the same day. He was sure they would all join him in thanking Elections Manager Kim Smith and Deputy Returning Officer Paul Jones for their hard work to ensure that everything ran smoothly, and also all the officers who participated on polling day and at the count;
- he recently attended two events as Deputy Mayor: the AGM of SSAFA, the armed forces charity which does excellent work in supporting ex-servicemen; and a dinner at the Jazz Festival with guests from Annecy and Gottingen, some of whom were participating in the event. He said their presence adds immense value to these international events;
- on behalf of Catholic residents, he welcomed the new Pope Leo XIV, wished him luck, and hoped the nations of the world would heed his call for peace.

In advance of sharing information about his chosen Mayor's charities, he said he would send an email to all Members about 'give as you earn', which allows them to donate to a charity of their choice direct from their councillor allowance. He said he

has done this since becoming a councillor, donating to the Mayor's charities, and while under no compulsion, asked people to consider doing the same.

He ended on a sad note, sharing news of the death of former Councillor and Honorary Alderman Malcolm Stennett who served Prestbury ward from 2000 to 2021. He invited members to pay tribute.

Councillor Hay said she served with Malcolm for many years, and knew him as a decent, honest man. She attended his funeral which was a pleasant celebration of a life well lived and a long-serving councillor, dedicated to his community. She reminisced that he was often seen around the town with his two enormous dogs.

Councillor Smith said he had the privilege of working with Malcolm at Dowty's, always found him to be a gentleman, ready to listen and help with sensible answers, and very much respected by all who knew him.

A minute's silence was observed in his memory.

8 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader thanked and congratulated the new Mayor, and wished him a fulfilling year, and shared the following communications:

- welcome to Councillor Healy, newly elected in Charlton Kings ward;
- thanks to Councillor Baker for his year as Mayor, and for his contributions to the town and Council meetings;
- congratulations and thanks to Councillor Horwood, who has been a valued member of the Cabinet and is now stepping down as he becomes Deputy Mayor;
- on behalf of the council, condolences are sent to Honorary Freeman Les Bonney on the loss of his wife, Beryl.

She went on to update Members on some Cabinet and committee changes:

- Councillor Lewis is to become Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery, Councillor Jeffries will revert to being Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, and Councillor Tailford will become Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm;
- welcome to Councillor Baker who is joining the Cabinet as Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Parks and Gardens;
- Councillor Dobie is stepping down from the Cabinet; thanks to him for his contribution as a valued Member of the team over the last four years; a new Cabinet member will be announced by the end of May, following elections in the Liberal Democrat group;
- Councillor Allen will become Vice-Chair of Planning Committee and step down from Overview and Scrutiny, to be replaced on that committee by Councillor Healy; Councillor Dobie will replace Councillor Baker on Planning Committee;
- congratulations to everyone who held or won seats at the county council elections; she is looking forward to working closely with the Liberal Democrat administration.

She said the past year has been eventful, with all-out borough elections, a general election, the new government's announcement of local government reform, and the recent county council elections. All this is in addition to the delivery of our Corporate Plan, bringing housing services back in-house, building houses, investing in communities, retaining green and purple flags for our parks and gardens and night-time economy, and opening the MX and the new computing school at the university, and the success of seeing the Golden Valley move forward, being mentioned this week as a key driver for growth in a keynote speech by the Secretary of State.

9 To receive petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

10 Public Questions

There were none.

11 Member Questions

There were none.

12 Community Governance Review

The Leader introduced her report, saying that the local government review means that Cheltenham will become part of a unitary council in one way or other, and with only five parish councils at present representing local communities, this could leave a big part of the town without local representation. It is important, therefore, to start thinking about this now, and a cross-party Cabinet Member Working Group, led by Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, has met to get the process underway and establish the terms of reference.

She asked Council to approve the terms of reference as set out in the report appendices, which approve consultation with the wider public and the existing parishes. The information gathered from the first round will inform further consultation on what people would like to happen – a town council, more or fewer parish councils, boundary changes - the important thing being to get this in place before we go through local government reorganisation, in order to protect our communities and ensure that all residents have a voice.

Questions

A Member thanked the Leader and working group for a sensible and well-put-together group of reasons. In response to Members' questions, the Leader and Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, confirmed that:

- Members are voting today solely on the terms of reference and start of the consultation and review period, not the timetable or reorganisation order;
- regarding the indicative timetable set out in the report, which might be seen to imply that the reorganisation order could be made by February 2026 –a Member

felt this was good if a minimal set of adjustments was required, but incredibly ambitious and potentially problematic if bigger implications around the existence of parish councils arise from the consultation - it is important to say that we are not looking to abolish any parish councils. They may choose not to exist, or may want to create new parish councils and extend or reduce their boundaries, which is relatively simple from a governance point of view. It would make sense, therefore, to do this as soon as possible in the new year, in advance of the financial precepts they will want to raise;

- the bigger question is around the rest of the town, whether a town council or more parish councils are wanted. The timeline is set so that we will be able to anticipate the direction of travel by February 2026 and it will be in our gift then to pause if the government's plan to make a decision by February 2027 goes awry;
- at the end of the day, the main issue is that we could end up with no local representation if we don't do something different as a town, and we need to act now to make sure that all residents and local communities have a voice and that their voice is heard;
- consultation in non-parished areas will be through friends groups, residents associations, wide coverage on social media, drop-in sessions, and councillors, who are leaders in their communities and will need to spread the word;
- Members are voting today on the terms of reference because although the Leader doesn't need permission to carry out a Community Governance Review, the terms of reference have to be agreed by Full Council in order for it to happen;
- if Council approves, the terms of reference will be published on 19 May, and the official consultation will go live on that date;
- the indicative timeline in the report is not up for consultation – it could change if, for example, the first stage produces a large number of recommendations. Any recommendations for changes will need to come back to Council in October for Council to agree. At that time, Council may decide to take all recommendations forward for implementation in February 2026, in time for the parish council elections in May, or could decide to take some forward then and others on a longer timescale.

Debate

A Member expressed concern about the speed at which the timetable is proposed. Although aware of the need to get local representation in place before CBC becomes part of a unitary authority, his parish council is not due to meet until July when they will set about the task of consulting with their constituents and formulating their own view. The way the timetable is proposed will make it difficult to do a thorough job.

The Leader said she would take these comments on board but was keen to do everything possible to get changes in place early next year.

Members added the following observations:

- the review is welcome, presenting an ambitious timeframe at present – we will only know if it is achievable until we start. The difference in infrastructure investment between parished and unparished areas in Cheltenham is marked, and this is a potentially great opportunity to remedy this;

- with unitarisation taking power away from local people, this review is welcome as it will make sure they remain involved and engaged in local democracy – it is local people who care most about their areas and want to make changes to the things that matter. The timeline is fast but serves its purpose and is on the right track;
- the council must do its best to consult as widely as possible, although this is difficult.

The Leader reiterated that all Members should act as advocates and champions in their local communities, and encourage people to get involved and consider setting up new parish councils or changing the boundaries of existing ones.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that Council:

- **the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review are agreed, signifying the formal start of the Review and commencement of the first stage consultation.**

13 Appointment of the Chair of Licensing Committee

The Monitoring Officer invited nominations for a Chair of Licensing Committee.

Councillor Simon Wheeler was proposed by Councillor Hay and seconded by Councillor Harvey.

As no other names were put forward, no vote was required, and Councillor Wheeler was duly appointed.

14 Notice of Motions

There were no motions.

15 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision

There was no other business.