

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 21 July 2025

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 3.25 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Julia Chandler, Flo Clucas, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Hannah Healy, Sandra Holliday, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Cathal Lynch, Tony Oliver, Ben Orme, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Sarah Farooqi (One Legal) and Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets and Deputy S151 Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Bamford, Beale, Clark, Collins, Garcia Clamp, Joy, Steinhardt, Wheeler and Willingham.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2025 were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Deputy Mayor reported on several events he has recently attended:

- Belmont School Summer Fete, where he won a teapot in the raffle and was very impressed with the efforts of the PTA;
- an impressive Achievement Day at St Edward's School;
- the 90th birthday party of Cheltenham Lido;
- the Friends of Sandford Park Summer Festival, where he met a new and inspiring environmental group, Guardians of the River Chelt.

The Mayor had provided a list of the many civic events he had attended in the last few weeks, and the Deputy Mayor read out a statement on his behalf. In it he said he had been struck by the diversity of events and activities happening across our town, especially the wide range of things being done to make other people's lives better, and when looking at the local charities supporting those with disabilities, he was reminded how important it is to make sure our public realm is accessible to all.

He also reminded everyone about the Mayor's charity quiz night, to be held in the Albion Club, North Street on Friday 3rd October 2025 at 7pm. Tickets are £10 per person, with teams of four to six, include a light buffet supper, and can be bought via the Mayor's page on the CBC website

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader said that a lot has happened throughout the borough since the last meeting:

- in July, Planning Committee approved the first application for the Golden Valley Development, the West Cheltenham Southern Parcel. The ambitious masterplan promises 3,700 homes, a million square feet of commercial space, and 12,000 jobs, and contributes to the UK's dream of being a science and tech superpower by 2030;
- the development at 320 Swindon Road is moving forward, with £2.8m funding from Homes England, and Speller Metcalfe as contractor;
- CBC improved its climate action score by 25% according to Climate Emergency UK, placing it 6th among UK district averages and top of the rankings within Gloucestershire. As reported to Cabinet this month, air quality monitoring around the Royal Mail depot is no longer required;
- seven of Cheltenham's parks have been awarded a Green Flag in recognition of environmental excellence;
- £136k-worth of grants has been awarded to 17 local projects in non-parished areas through the CIL Neighbourhood Fund;
- comments and contributions to the Community Governance Review consultation shaping parish and town boundaries and governance will be analysed over the summer;
- the No Child Left Behind Party in the Park will take place in Pittville Park on 06 August, with over 50 free and inclusive family activities;
- Horizon Aero Group has been named as the preferred buyer for Gloucestershire Airport, unlocking new opportunities for investment;
- a summer campaign is underway to ensure the town centre remains safe, welcoming and vibrant;

- and finally, Members are encouraged to share the link for the Local Government Reform engagement questionnaire, to give as many of their personal and professional contacts the opportunity to have their say.

6 To receive petitions

There were none.

7 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

8 Member Questions

There was one Member question, which was taken as read, together with the response:

Question from Councillor Jan Foster to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

It has been widely reported that Idsall Drive Car Park was sold by Cheltenham Borough Council last year for £282,500. It is now on the market, with planning permission, with an asking price for offers over £550,000.

Given the difference in value that the planning permission makes to a piece of land, why didn't the council apply for planning permission before they sold it?

Cabinet Member response:

I'd like to thank Councillor Foster for the question. It is important to set some background with regard to Idsall Drive car park. This was never intended to be a development opportunity for the council but rather the car park was offered to the parish council for purchase to be retained as a car park. Sadly, the parish council decided to not proceed with the purchase on behalf of their local residents and therefore the council decided to then proceed with a sale.

With specific regard to Idsall Drive, I am sure that Councillor Foster would acknowledge that the difference in the new asking price and what the council previously sold it for is not clear profit. The design, development and the planning process will have all incurred fees and costs. If the council had proceeded to secure planning for the site we would have had to make an assessment on the officer time and costs associated required to bring this site to planning and then balance that against delivering our other key development priorities. On this criteria, Idsall Drive did not meet the test of being retained and developed by the council.

This council has a long and successful track record of judging where and what to invest in and we are clear that we act as an enabler to support the economic prosperity of our borough and its residents.

At present, our highest development priority, as Councillor Foster knows, is the delivery of the Golden Valley Development. When fully completed, this project will bring hundreds of new, affordable and social rent homes - which are desperately needed in our town, as well as offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to many in our communities to gain skills and employment so they can succeed and prosper. In this context it is disappointing that Councillor Foster is seemingly supportive of developing Idsall Drive Carpark but voted against the Golden Valley Development planning application.

Supplementary question

Councillor Foster thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for his response, but before asking a supplementary question, took a moment to address what was included in the final paragraph. She pointed out that her question had nothing to do with the Golden Valley or affordable housing. She was concerned only with the sale of Idsall Drive car park, about which she attended many meetings and supported a petition in objection, and her question related to what happened after the parish council declined to buy it and CBC was left with an asset that it was determined to sell. With a difference of £267,500 between the original sale and the asking price of £550,000, she asked what the council estimated it would have cost to have drawn up plans and obtain a planning permission before selling the car park.

Cabinet Member response

In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said the asking price and the eventual selling price could be very different, but he was not specifically able to give an actual figure on the likely cost of obtaining planning permission for the site. He said he would speak to officers and provide the information as soon as possible.

9 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Outturn Report 2024-2025

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets was pleased to present the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Outturn Report for 2024-25, a statutory requirement under financial rules to provide an overview of the council's financial performance.

He said Members will be aware that the ambitious 2024-25 budget required delivery of £2.841m savings, and he was proud to report that despite ongoing external pressures, the council has delivered against budget and ended the year with a modest £913 underspend. This marks a significant shift in financial stability compared with previous years when we relied more heavily on general balances, and although those remain below the optimum level, medium-term financial strategy gives a realistic route to replenishment by March 2026.

The performance reflects strong financial governance and the efforts of Cabinet colleagues, officers and service teams across the organisation, ensuring continuity of key projects. Our capital investment programme continues to support delivery of strategic objectives, particularly climate action, housing, and supporting the local economy, while driving forward the Golden Valley development and supporting the most vulnerable in town. Furthermore, treasury management activities have improved the management of business rates and council tax collection, providing support where possible for the many households facing financial challenges. He said that although the housing revenue account shows a deficit, decisive action has been taken with the reintegration of housing services, and he anticipates this will drive efficiencies and rebuild services over coming years.

In conclusion, he said that the outturn report reflects the importance of building resilience into the system, while strengthening reserves to bring general balance levels to the optimum level as recommended by the S151 officer.

Member questions

While welcoming the very positive report, a Member said a number of residents are wondering whether income from the sale of major assets may have a positive impact on the future of the household recycling centre. A simple response would be appreciated and helpful.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said it is difficult to give a simple response, as any sale has liabilities attached and considerations to take into account, and although the council will be considering how incoming funds will be used, it faced many big financial challenges, especially around its key priorities, so it is difficult to say at this point where the money will be spent.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space reiterated that household recycling centres are the responsibility of the county council, but said he is meeting with county colleagues early next month to discuss the matter. No decision has been made; the site is secure and not being sold off, but needs £1m-worth of infrastructure improvements to function safely. He added that the county council is looking at the capacity of household recycling centres across the county generally, and it is noteworthy that since the closure of the Swindon Road site, usage of Wingmoor Farm has gone up by 26%, showing a significant number of Cheltenham residents are making use of that facility, which is now running efficiently at 95% capacity.

There was no debate on this item.

The following recommendations were approved.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. the financial outturn performance position for the General Fund was considered, and it was noted that in delivering services in 2024/25, after the application of carry forward requests and following the use earmarked reserves, there was an underspend of £913 against the 2024/25 revised budget approved by Council on 21 February 2025;**

2. £420,144 of carry forward approved by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers at Appendix 5 was noted;
3. the annual treasury management report at Appendix 7 and note the actual 2024/25 prudential and treasury indicators was noted;
4. the capital programme outturn position as detailed in Section 7 of this report and Appendix 8, approve the carry forward of unspent budgets into 2025/26 was noted;
5. the year-end position in respect of Section 106 agreements and partnership funding agreements at Appendix 9 was noted;
6. the outturn position in respect of collection rates for council tax and non-domestic rates for 2024/25 in Appendix 10 was noted;
7. the financial outturn performance position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2024/25 in Appendix 11 was received, and the carry-forward of capital budgets from 2024/25 into 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 12 was approved.

10 Corporate Plan Update, End of Year Performance Report and Corporate Plan Refresh

The Leader introduced the report which presents an overview of the refreshed Corporate Plan for 2025-28, a reassessment of its priorities following the reintegration of housing services to reflect local needs and national development. At the same time, a two-year review of the plan shows where progress has been made and where the council needs to do more, as well as ensuring it stays ahead of the curve in a fast-changing world.

She outlined the five key priorities:

- Securing Our Future
- Quality Homes, Safe and Strong Communities
- Reducing Carbon, Achieving Net Zero, Creating Biodiversity
- Reducing Inequalities, Supporting Better Outcomes
- Taking Care of Your Money

She said the performance report for 2024-25 shows some real wins, with progress on affordable housing, cyber infrastructure and digital services, but also highlights challenges, for example around homelessness prevention and recruitment in planning enforcement.

In conclusion, she reminded Members that the refreshed plan is about building on what is working, fixing what is not, and staying focussed on what matters most to Cheltenham residents.

Questions

In response to a Member's questions, the Leader said she believed that the years referred to in the plan – Year 1, Year 2 etc. – relate to the financial year rather than the calendar year.

Debate

Members welcomed the report, the refreshed plan, and the opportunity to pause and reflect on progress, thanking officers and Cabinet Members for their hard work in driving it forward. They made the following points:

- under Key Priority 4, it would be good to amend the heading to 'continue to build relationships with local, regional, national and international visitor economy stakeholders' in view of the Liberal Democrats and the town being outward-looking and international. Thanks to Richard Gibson for his excellent work in the international arena, and to Andrew Lansley and Ian George of Cheltenham Festivals for their great efforts working with partner towns and raising Cheltenham's international profile;
- the Corporate Plan should be used to showcase the council's ongoing commitment to the UK's efforts towards the United National Sustainable Development Goals, such as Key Priority 2's working directly to achieve Goal 11, regarding sustainable cities and communities. The Member will be happy to look at this with officers and Cabinet colleagues;
- the shift to more vague, overarching key priorities is welcomed, but when delving deeper, there is space for more concrete targets and actions. For example, one of the actions under Key Priority 1 is 'clear social value targets with a main contractor by the end of Year 1', but there is no indication of what the council would like those targets to be; and a target under Key Priority 3 is to construct the innovation centre by the end of Year 2 as a low carbon building, but with no metric defining a low-carbon building, it isn't clear precisely what we exactly want to achieve. The report sets out many great initiatives but doesn't take them far enough;
- the plan is full of good stuff, but while Key Priority 2 clearly shows how hard everyone has worked on the reintegration of housing services and the progress made, the end-of-year performance table shows the number of homeless preventions and relief with a red flag, as a result of rising and increasingly unaffordable rents in the private sector. While stating that the council will set a benchmark for reasonable rents that private landlords will hopefully aspire to, there doesn't appear to be anything in the plan about interventions to encourage this, and just setting a good example on its own may not be enough. It would be good to see more proactive engagements with the private rental sector to prevent unreasonable rents, which would hopefully have a knock-on effect on homelessness.

In response to this opinion, several Members commented as follows:

- the first priority of the Corporate Plan is to secure our future, and as part of that major housing development such as at Golden Valley and Elms Park are being brought forward. The law of supply and demand dictates that with more houses available, property and rental costs will fall;
- the Corporate Plan is a strategic overview of the council's priorities, not a deep dive into the detail of each priority, many of which are already being looked at as part of the Cabinet's workplan;
- homelessness is complicated and not just due to high rent – mental health, dependencies, breakdown of families and other issues all contribute to the problem and are out of the council's control.

The Member replied that, while not an expert on housing, research has shown what other councils are doing, such as limiting Airbnbs, which are problematic in Cheltenham and have been shown in studies to drive up private rentals. She suggested that CBC could maybe monitor Airbnbs or keep a register of all private landlords to ensure they are paying the right amount of council tax.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services thanked the Member for raising this important subject, and said that a report would be going to the Cabinet Housing meeting in September to look at the private rental sector, consider what the council can do to assist through proper agreements, and to give advice where needed. She invited the Member to attend that meeting and ask questions, to ensure an open, decent and honest debate. Regarding Airbnb, she said this is an international problem, and the government needs to take a firm line to prevent it from pushing up rents and removing housing for the people who need it.

Members made the following additional points:

- if any Member has a suggestion or idea for tackling homelessness, they should share it direct with Cabinet colleagues and officers. Airbnbs and the housing shortage are national government issues, but CBC is always trying to find ways to alleviate the problem locally and is proud of its actions;
- homelessness and the housing shortage is a very real and insidious problem and a wide issue, synonymous with national government.

The Leader said Members had covered all the points she would have made, and confirmed that the Corporate Plan is more of an outline – it needs to be short, concise and engaging to encourage people to read it thoroughly, with further detail available for anyone who is interested.

She was happy to incorporate the word ‘international’ in KP4, and the Deputy Mayor confirmed that this is acceptable.

With that small amendment, Members voted on the recommendations and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **the corporate plan review and end of year performance report is noted;**
2. **the refreshed Corporate Plan 2025 to 2028 is endorsed.**

11 Dispensation under section 85 Local Government Act 1972

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report to allow Councillor Joy, who has been unable to attend meetings since March due to ill health, a period of dispensation of up to six months.

The Leader wished Councillor Joy a speedy recovery and return to the fold, and the Deputy Mayor said that this was endorsed by all Members.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that:

- **Councillor Tabi Joy is authorised to be absent from all meetings of the Authority for a period of 6 months with effect from 21 July 2025**

12 Notice of Motions

There were none.

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

There were no other items.

14 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

RESOLVED THAT:

- in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 5: Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

15 A Property Matter

Members considered the report and approved the recommendations.