

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 26 November 2024

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.50 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets and Deputy S151 Officer) and Chris Gomm (Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance)

1 Apologies

There were none.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 24 September and 08 October were approved unanimously as true records, and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

No Member questions or petitions had been received.

There was one public question, as follows:

1. Question from Ian Mason to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

I am concerned that those who are doing the bulk collections for CBC are apparently not insured to enter our properties. The result of this is that tenants with long-term health conditions/disabilities are being expected to carry domestic appliances such as fridge freezers and washing machines down several flights of stairs prior to collection. This is something they have neither the equipment or the training to do safely and are therefore being put at risk of serious injury. My impression is that the service has been designed for people who live in houses, with kitchens at ground level, and that no thought or provision has been given to those many residents who live in flats, this includes not only the long-term sick and disabled, but the elderly and pregnant women who just happen to live on the 3rd floor.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the question. I understand the concern and I am personally very keen to make sure we do what we can to help residents living with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

The Council's kerbside bulky waste service is delivered by a third party, Reclaim. Collections are booked via the Council and passed on to Reclaim to deliver the service. Reclaim rarely go into people's properties (dwellings or gardens) because the current arrangement is for kerbside pick-up, just like most of our other waste and recycling services, and it is priced accordingly.

Having said this, in special circumstances and at no extra charge to the council, Reclaim have entered properties where a resident has needed extra assistance for example, where age, medical condition or disability prevents someone from depositing their items at the kerbside and where they are unable to call on anyone for assistance.

Reclaim's insurance does extend to such work, but it is not part of the standard service and most residents have friends or family or can help take items to the kerbside. Where this is genuinely not possible assistance can be provided but should be reserved only for those in real need of help.

The service is priced on a kerbside pick-up basis to keep prices as low as possible. Entry pick-ups take much longer to do and they are not as straight forward.

Some of the common issues found when collecting furniture donations for resale are listed below:

- customer absent and unable to gain entry;
- customers asks for safety boots to be removed;
- items require dismantling;
- items require disconnection from gas, water or electricity;

- items were in place before internal structures were altered, e.g. smaller doors or radiators installed that prevent exit with item;
- Lack of preparation by customer, including:
 - route out blocked by furniture or other things,
 - fridges and freezers not defrosted and/or containing food items
 - unfriendly dogs present.

We need to keep number of Entry pick-ups as low as we can, to ensure the overall pricing of the service can remain as low as possible for residents. So we ask that residents use friends, family and neighbours to help them get items to kerbside where they can.

Supplementary question

When services are being designed, can the widest possible cross-section of residents be involved in the process to ensure it is as accessible as it can be for everyone?

Cabinet Member response:

As set out in the main response, the system is adaptable and collectors can go in and help where there is genuine need. This is not advertised too widely for the reasons given, and to avoid abuse of the system.

5 Local Planning Enforcement Plan

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said that a planning enforcement plan is not a statutory requirement for local authorities and that CBC is going above and beyond to keep residents informed. He said so much has changed since the last version was written ten years ago that it was decided to write a completely new document, which is informative and clear to understand, fits in with corporate plan priorities, is in line with National Planning Policy Guidance, and is fair, balanced and realistic. It also includes a useful one-page guide.

Members welcomed this well-designed, clear and easy-to-understand document, and thanked officers for the work that has gone into it. It will be a helpful tool for residents in explaining what is and isn't planning enforcement, together with useful tips and web links for further information. The timings, prioritisation and rationale behind planning enforcement are clearly explained in the 12-page document, which is recommended reading for anyone who wants to be better informed.

In view of the significant backlog in planning enforcement cases dating back to the pandemic, and people's frustration about enforcement issues, a Member welcomed the appointment of the Head of Planning, and asked what progress had been made in recruiting an enforcement team which is so crucial at ground level.

The Head of Planning confirmed that recruiting an enforcement officer to work with the senior enforcement officer has proved challenging, with very little interest in the role. He has recently revisited the job description, which originally required the post-holder to be a qualified planner, focussing instead on the investigative nature of the role, and there has been some interest in the internal advert – so there is light at the

end of the tunnel. In the meantime, a three-month agency contract will help clear the backlog.

The Leader pointed out that there is a national problem in recruiting planners. She said that retro-fitting Cheltenham's many beautiful listed buildings for the future continues to be a challenge and people often make genuine mistakes around planning enforcement, but it is important that these are picked up and rectified to preserve the heritage of the town.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the draft Local Planning Enforcement Plan is approved;**
- 2. the public-facing draft Local Planning Enforcement Guide is approved.**

6 Award of Rent Support Grants to voluntary sector organisations

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said how great it is to be able to offer grants to tenants who do good work for the town, and she was therefore delighted to offer Whaddon Bowls Club a 24% reduction in their rent in recognition of their important contribution, providing exercise and a social space which creates real joy in a central location. She welcomed the report and thanked Whaddon Bowls Club for being a real asset to Cheltenham.

The Leader said that CBC is happy to award grants to a wide range of voluntary sector partners, from scout groups and community centres to the Gardens Gallery, in recognition of the work they do to keep communities strong

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. a rent support grant of 24% of current market rent to Whaddon Bowls Club, Whaddon Road is agreed;**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader, in consultation with the Director: One Legal to agree the terms of a rent support grant agreement with the applicant.**

7 Treasury Mid-term Report 2024-25

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said this fascinating report sets out how the council safeguards and invests taxpayers' money to underpin the vital services it delivers, including No Child Left Behind and investment in Golden Valley to provide homes and jobs for Cheltenham's future. She is heartened that the strategy has weathered the storm of the last few years, and that CBC can start looking at recovery. Our borrowing strategy is very carefully worked out, putting CBC in a strong place compared with other councils, and she thanked the officer team who

lead on this work and keep finances on the straight and narrow with exciting and innovative ideas.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery agreed, saying this is one of the most important documents produced by the council, demonstrating what is being done with taxpayers' money, and noting how hard the team works to be innovative, responsive and reactive in achieving the best rates and maintaining a strong overarching financial position.

RESOLVED THAT:

- the contents of this summary report of the treasury management activity during the first six months of 2024/25 are noted.

8 Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 - position at 30 September 2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets began her introduction by saying that CBC goes far beyond its statutory requirements in many ways, but despite the substantial cost of this, manages its finances wisely and remains in a good position, driven by officers across the council who want to do the best they can for the people of Cheltenham. They chart a difficult course between what people what deserve and what the council's means allow for, having to look constantly at the services the council provides and how to deliver them. Innovation, prudence, and careful financial planning ensure targets are met and vital services are maintained. In addition, the Communities team does extra work with grant applications, making the most of all opportunities.

She said that the shortfalls early in the report are down to timing, particularly around planning, with some major applications coming in too late to be included in the report and other exciting projects still to pay off. She thanked Gemma Bell and the finance team for their excellent work to make it all possible.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services was happy to note how officers have raised money to enable the council to help the poorest families in Cheltenham, helping 7000 children over the last couple of years. She thanked the Communities team for the work they do, and hopes it will continues. She also thanked the finance team for recognising the need to change the future for many people.

She noted a typo in Paragraph 4.9 of the report:

The current Government policy is that supported accommodation managed by an organisation that is not a Registered Provider does ~~that~~ not qualify to receive full Housing Benefit Subsidy

The Leader said the Mid-Term Treasury Report and Budget Monitoring Report demonstrate how well the council is doing since the pandemic. Before 2020, the trajectory was to be financially sustainable by 2025, without government support. The resilience of Members and officers shows in that the council is well on that road again, although it will of course take longer, and some services have had to be

reduced or done differently in order to keep delivering what the council wants to do for the people of Cheltenham.

RESOLVED THAT:

- the contents of this report are noted, including the key projected variances to the general fund and Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) 2024/25 revenue and capital budgets approved by Council on 23 February 2024, and the actions to ensure overspends are reduced as far as possible by the end of the financial year.

9 Waste and Recycling Review

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm gave a long and detailed introduction to this item, highlighting the main issues as set out in his report. He began by explaining the reasons for the proposed temporary closure of the Household Recycling Centre (HRC), specifically the new Environment Agency requirements and the high cost of the necessary improvements, with no guarantee of a permit at the end. He was aware that the proposal is controversial, and that the HRC is a valued site, but pointed out that waste disposal is in fact a county council function - CBC is not required to provide the service, and kerbside collection of recyclables and garden waste has grown exponentially since the HRC was opened 40 years ago. As a result, the HRC has become more of a tip than a recycling centre which was never the intention, and over the last two years, daily visits have dropped from 1000 to 400-500; these can be absorbed by Wingmoor Farm which also accepts a wider range of types of rubbish.

The estimated costs of the work, in addition to the regular running costs, represent a very large percentage of CBC’s 11% council tax share but a very small percentage of the county’s 74% share. CBC has subsidised the provision of waste disposal for 40 years, and it does not make financial sense for both county and borough to provide the same service. He hopes that that county will be willing to work with CBC to find a solution which works for the people of Cheltenham; some conversations have already taken place, and a face-to-face meeting will be held soon.

The recommendation is to close Swindon Road HRC for a prolonged period while different options are being considered. These include:

- the county council taking on the Swindon Road site;
- the expansion Wingmoor Farm – which has recently been upgraded and much improved with an efficient booking system in place;
- the opening of a brand new site.

If none of these are taken forward, other options will have to be considered, and residents will be able to share their thoughts through the budget consultation process. Charging for visits to the site is not workable – the cost to residents would be too high - and with the current site no longer fit for purpose, both councils will have to consider medium-term plans and decide whether it is worth spending £1m on the existing site for a short-term solution.

It is hoped that the additional drive to Wingmoor Farm won't result in an increase in criminal fly-tipping, which is a challenge for all councils; this will be monitored closely. Savings from the Swindon Road site will be re-invested in other services - weeding, leaf clearance, bring banks, and fly-tipping clearance.

If approved, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to look at the issue, and there will be public consultation, including a resident survey in 2025, and regular updates throughout – the council recognises the importance of this.

The second part of the report concerns small commercial waste collection which currently loses money and requires investment. The council's vehicles cannot collect all that is required, and it would cost many hundreds of thousands of pounds to buy enough new vehicles. However, many private companies offer the service and the council is keen to explore opportunities to work with small businesses to find an alternative, which will also offer employment opportunities for those affected by the decision.

The third part of the report concerns delivery charges for waste and recycling receptacles, introduced earlier this year. There has been no drop-off in orders since the charges were introduced, but the proposal is to reduce the costs as set out in the report, to coincide with the closure of HRC.

He ended by saying that this is not a report he would have wanted to present, but action is required and he hoped to work collaboratively to find the best solution for tax payers and residents. Although it is not a popular decision, he hoped that residents would understand why it had to be made.

The Leader invited Councillor Davies, co-leader of the Green Party, to speak. She said she and other Green Members had been talking to concerned residents who had many suggestions and questions they were unable to answer. She hoped to see positive outcomes, and is looking forward to seeing equitable and accessible methods of waste disposal in the future. She will forward a document of feedback comments to Members, and encouraged people to share their thoughts via the budget consultation.

In response to her question as to why the proposal is to close the HRC in January and when exactly the legislation to make it non-compliant is expected to come into effect, the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm said legislation was originally going to come into force in November 2024, but the change in

government has delayed this till 2025 – with no official date yet. As the council budget for the year must be planned, with or without the £1m required to upgrade the HRC, the proposal has been made and residents are invited to comment via the budget consultation. The window between closure of the site in early January and the end of the current financial year will give time to see how kerbside collections, bring banks and Wingmoor Farm are coping with the loss of the Swindon Road facility.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency supported the proposal, saying CBC now collects a larger range of recyclables than anywhere in the country. He was aware that the HRC is located in a residential area, and cars have traditionally queued to get in with their engines running; he wondered what monitoring of the effect on air pollution would take place during the time services were suspended, and whether this would be fed back into the report and shared with residents, who he hoped would benefit from the reduction in traffic.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm agreed that this is an important consideration, and said that the more kerbside collections the council can do the better, reducing the number of car trips people need to make.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm for a detailed and difficult-to-present report. He said it is important that people understand that the job of waste disposal is a statutory requirement of the county council; CBC is the only authority in the UK to provide this discretionary service, which it has done for the last 40 years, in effect subsidising the county council. Regarding fly-tipping, although this is a particular issue in some areas, he doesn't imagine that residents will fly-tip as a matter of course rather than taking their rubbish to Wingmoor Farm.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets commented that central government sees Cheltenham with its economic prosperity as a place where more houses could be built to help with the national housing crisis, but as councillors know, this would result in an enormous stretch on infrastructure, and money and means would need to be found to support the growth. She wondered if central government has been forthcoming in supporting the work needed to provide this discretionary service and the population growth they have in mind. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm said this is one of the challenges the council faces, for example, the requirement to collect soft plastics by 2025-27 but no confirmation as to whether New Burdens funding will be available. It is left to councils to work things out and purchase the right vehicles, which is a lot more challenging.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm and the team for the report, aware that they had agonised over the decision. He also thanked Councillor Davies for the constructive way in which she asked her question, looking to the future, and noting that many Green Party-led district councils cannot provide this type of service.

With this in mind, he asked if the ultimate aim of CBC is to increase recycling overall and continue on an upward trajectory. He also asked whether, as a comparison, when the HRC opened 40 years ago there was no kerbside recycling at all, and now 90% of recycling is collected at the kerbside with most of the remainder taken to bring banks? If this is the case, it would suggest that the time has passed for HRCs.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm confirmed that 40 years ago, nothing was collected at the kerb; paper collection started in the early 2000s, followed by glass, cans and garden waste, and by 2011 the council was collecting a huge range of items, with coffee pods added a couple of years ago. The council is always looking for more ways to recycle, including adding another bring bank site, and working with local organisations and charities that will take goods such as larger electricals and furniture items to be recycled and re-used, thus reducing waste.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery said the report was detailed and inclusive, and reflected on the fact that forward-thinking residents of Cheltenham were keen to recycle decades ago. The world and the town have changed hugely since then, and although this current change is being forced by improved environmental standards, it is a good opportunity to review how we do things. The recommendations have his whole-hearted support.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm confirmed that, if the proposals are approved, he wants the council to take the public on the journey, being as open and honest as possible at every stage, and making sure residents are updated throughout.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. Cabinet agrees that from Friday 10 January 2025 the Swindon Road recycling centre will undergo a prolonged closure in order for a full options appraisal to be undertaken on the future of the Swindon Road Depot and the Household Recycling Centre. The options appraisal will include an assessment of the site and the potential for finding a cost-effective solution to meet with new and future environmental legislation and regulations, engagement with GCC, engagement and consultation and appropriate involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2. Cabinet agrees that the Council will cease to provide a direct commercial waste service to businesses in Cheltenham from a date to be determined by the Chief Executive.**
- 3. authority is delegated to the Chief Executive to implement recommendation 1 and 2, including the necessary contract variation with Ubico and to make suitable alternative arrangements for existing customers of the Council's commercial waste service.**

- 4. Cabinet agrees that the delivery charges for receptacles agreed by Cabinet on 23 July 2024 (recommendation 1) are amended as follows with effect from 1 January 2025 to assist residents using the kerbside service for any items which can no longer be taken to the Household Recycling Centre: £4.99 for up to 3 items (with a reduced delivery charge of £2.99 for up to 3 items for residents in receipt of benefits as listed in reported dated 23 July 2024) and £9.98 for up to 6 items (with a reduced delivery charge of £5.98 for up to 6 items for residents in receipt of benefits as listed in the report dated 23 July 2024).**

10 Grant of lease at St Mark's and Hester's Way Community Centre

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that St Mark's and Hester's Way Community Centre is an amazing asset, which it is the council's privilege to safeguard and help to continue in community use. Since the previous tenant surrendered the lease, it has been a difficult challenge to find an exciting new tenant, particularly as the building requires some attention. However, after some excellent bids were submitted, with advice from the property team on how to make the building fit for purpose, and due diligence was undertaken, the council is happy to offer the lease to Alliance for Equality. They have big and exciting plans to maintain the building as an accessible and inclusive community space, and she wishes them the best of luck going forward.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for her report, which highlighted the important role community centres play in the heart of the communities they serve. This is an opportunity to work with a great organisation, which will bring new life and community engagement back to the centre, supporting the community organisations already based there.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control welcomed the report, and also the aims and energy of the new leaseholder. They have challenges ahead, but he is confident they can overcome them and bring this building back to full use in a part of town which needs such a facility.

The Leader agreed that community centres are at the heart of communities and very much valued by residents. As things evolve and times change, it is exciting to see a new group coming forward to rejuvenate the building, move with the times, and take it in a new direction.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the completion of due diligence on the submitted proposals for the site is agreed;**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Director of Finance and Assets to negotiate the terms of the lease to Alliance for Equality, in consultation with the Director of One Legal.**

11 Grants Policy

Introducing her report, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that CBC is entrusted with a great deal of money from various partners and stakeholders, and a rigorous process is required to ensure that every penny of it is allocated wisely. The Grants Policy outlines policies and procedures, as well as advising on how to make grant applications and launch grant schemes. She thanked officers for their work, in particular the Monitoring Officer, Claire Hughes, for her huge knowledge and impeccable eye for detail, and for ensuring that the process is better and more transparent than ever before.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities thanked officers, the Cabinet Member and Monitoring Officer for a particularly well-written report, with all elements brought together to ensure the process is transparent, efficient, effective and fair to everyone – a good and effective step in the right direction.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the Grants Management Policy (Appendix 3) is approved.**

12 Annual Local Council Tax Support Scheme

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said this scheme allows people who need it most to pay reduced or no council tax, giving them one less thing to worry about when they are struggling financially. The new scheme is more generous than previously, allowing the council to support people to the very best of its ability. It includes a new category for people in receipt of armed forces support, disregarding that payment as income, and next year will be even more generous.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm said this is one of the areas where Cheltenham Borough Council goes above and beyond what most councils do, to help the most vulnerable people. He commended the report.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services asked for confirmation that people who do not have internet access can apply by phone. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets confirmed that CBC understands the differing expectations across the town, and that access to services by phone is still important, particularly since the pandemic. She encouraged anyone in need of assistance to reach out.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery said that one of the beauties of Cheltenham is that the services residents value are maintained. This scheme supports some of the most financially vulnerable people in the town; elsewhere in the country, similar schemes have been scrapped.

The Leader said the council has to make some hard financial decisions, but for her, this is an easy one. It recognises the effect of the financial crisis on people

struggling with the cost of living and rising household bills, and not just the poorest communities. The demand for council tax support has increased as the cost of living has gone up. The winter fuel allowance cut is also having an impact on many older people, and she encouraged pensioners to ask the council for assistance, which may be direct benefits or help and signposting to what else is available for them.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the outcome of the consultation on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in Appendix 3 is noted;**
- 2. the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers in Appendix 4 and summarised in Appendix 5 is approved as the preferred option for 2025/26.**
- 3. the proposed scheme is adopted and Council is recommended to approve and adopt the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers for 2025/26.**
- 4. Council is recommended to give authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets to uprate any premiums, allowances and determine the income levels in line with any increase in Welfare Benefits by 21 February 2025.**

13 Corporate Risk Register - update

The Leader introduced her report, reminding Members of what risk means in reality: every report carries a risk assessment, some high, some low, some non-existent, but all must be acknowledged. Her pet phrase in 2016, in relation to commercial strategy, was that the council needs to be risk aware but not risk averse, and it is good to see how risks reduce and sometimes disappear, as with the MX building – the risk was high when getting the project over the line, was acknowledged at every stage, and has now disappeared with the project completed. Bringing housing services back to CBC carries some inevitable risks, which need to be addressed, as does the Golden Valley project, but transparency is key.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery said this vital document sits in the background; it is important to be aware of the risks, which help Members and officers to be better informed when making decisions. He was sorry to note that the vulnerability of homelessness funding has remained on the register for many years, and hoped that the government will invest in this area.

RESOLVED THAT:

- the Corporate Risk Register is noted.**

14 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture shared the following:

- despite terrible weather, Cheltenham launched its Christmas shopping season at the weekend, a collaboration between local business, the council, BID, the Cheltenham Trust and several local groups. On Thursday the ice rink will open, using battery power to reduce its carbon emissions by 98.7% and less noise for local residents. Thanks to Helen Mole and especially to Tara for working with sponsors, including Lidl, the headline sponsor;
- thanks to the Mayor of Annecy, Monsieur Francois Astorg, and Hugo Epineuse of this team, who hosted a delegation from Cheltenham. It included representatives of Cheltenham Festivals, with a view to forging closer links between the jazz festival and the new Annecy jazz festival, sharing information about multi-use venues used for culture, music and sport, and budget cuts from governments requiring them to make enormous savings;
- congratulations to Cheltenham Festivals on a successful literature festival, with numbers almost back to pre-Covid levels. The event was fossil-free for the second year, welcomed 12000 children over six days, and used AI in innovative and interesting ways. Thanks to Andrew Lansley, who has worked for the council and the Cheltenham Culture Board for all his work;
- thanks to Laurie Bell, the outgoing chief executive of the Cheltenham Trust. She is retiring after six years, and has done an enormous amount of work for the Trust and the town.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services was interested to hear about the Annecy event, and told members about a meeting due to take place in Leeds in December which will bring together French and British elective representatives to look at ways in which they can work together on climate and culture. It will be a great opportunity to build on relations with Annecy as well as other French towns and cities.

In addition, she shared the following briefings:

- she attended a very interesting briefing meeting with the housing regulator, who explained their role and methods, and answered questions. It was notable that tenants feature highly in every aspect of their work, and with a tenant rep on the Housing Cabinet Committee, CBC will continue to work together closely to ensure the tenant voice is at the core of everything we do;
- the housing support forum brings together everyone connected with housing across social housing and private rental, to discuss what they do and how they do it. She suggested that at future meetings, the police, social services and health service representatives could be included to look at how they can work together, on matters such as anti-social behaviour and drug dealing which affect people in Cheltenham and the wider community;
- she will attend a meeting of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions next week in Karlsruhe, where delegates will be discussing housing amongst other things. Also, the EU is planning to introduce a European card, a bank card that can be used across Europe, and it will be interesting to hear how that will work as we may find ourselves affected by it, despite no longer being in the EU.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change reported on the previous week's Schools Climate Conference in the Council Chamber, in which 14 schools and 65 students took part in a Mock Cop29 event. It was hugely successful, with excellent media coverage from Radio Gloucester and Points West. The students held their own

COP negotiations, then grilled a panel of local climate experts with some tough questions. He hopes that it will become an annual event.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm reported that:

- the council is always looking to do the best it can for the planet and the public purse, and last year switched to Plan B as its material broker for recycled material. Not only do they pay a better price, but they also offer higher social value – as part of the contract they donate to food banks, and since March 2023 have donated 8000 items for families in need. Last year's recycling rate was 51%, and he encouraged residents to recycle as much as possible, as the higher the rate of recycling, the more Plan B donate to food banks;
- Fiddlers Green Park recently received new play equipment, partly funded by community organisations, and it is good to see children and families enjoying themselves.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities had two updates:

- she thanked the organisers of Cheltenham Interfaith Week, where places of worship open their doors and share their beliefs and values to get a better understanding of each other. She thanked all involved for these enlightening events which demonstrated that regardless of faith, they are all working together and doing good work in their communities. The week ended with a lovely meal at the Hindu Centre;
- on Monday 25 November, 16 days of action started to raise awareness of and help end gender-based violence. The council has a group which focuses on Violence Against Women and Girls, working with community groups and businesses in the town centre. More information about the 16 days of action can be found on the CBC website; activities include exploitation training, Reclaim the Night walk on Friday 29 November, and a creative art project at Pittville school.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets invited anyone with any questions about the budget consultation to email her, as she wants to ensure people are in a good place before the consultation starts.

The Leader shared three updates:

- the new government requires each county to have a growth plan, and CBC is rising to the challenge through a recent event at the MX building, which was well attended by local academics, voluntary sector, building companies and businesses; their conclusions will be fed into the bigger mix for the county council and inform the growth plan. The evening ended with a poll of priorities and it was heartening to note that the top priority is attainable housing, recognising the logical fact that without this there will be no growth;
- twenty years of IT Schools Africa (ITSA) was recently celebrated at Kohler Mira in Cromwell Road, with many businesses in attendance for the launch of a new limb, getting more people to sign up. The organisation started by providing technology and computers to young people in South Africa, but this year has done a lot more in Gloucestershire, broadening out its original offer. It was a pleasure to see people's commitment to supporting this important work;
- on Monday, the University of Gloucestershire officially launched FuturePark, an exciting new learning space at Park Campus offering Cyber Security, Computing, and Computer Games Design and Programming courses. It was opened by the Director of GCHQ and the Golden Valley development was mentioned. Students and lecturers provided tours and demonstrations, and it was exciting to anticipate Cheltenham growing its own talent feed into its future as a major cyber centre.

15 Cabinet Member decisions since the last meeting

Three Cabinet Members reported on decisions they had taken since the last meeting of Cabinet:

1. 24 October 2024: Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

[To award a contract to Dennis Eagle Ltd for the supply of two refuse collection vehicles](#)

2. 13 November 2024: Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

[To appoint Tersus Consulting Ltd to undertake asbestos surveying and associated duties](#)

3. 21 November 2024: Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture, Councillor Martin Horwood

[Award of grant to the Cheltenham Trust for replacement gym equipment](#)