

Cheltenham Borough Council

Council

Minutes

Meeting date: 13 October 2025

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 4.10 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Dr David Willingham (Chair), Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Julia Chandler, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Dr Cathal Lynch, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities) and Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Barnes, Beale, Chandler, Foster, Garcia Clamp, Healy, Holliday, Joy, Oliver and Orme.

2 Declarations of interest

Councillor Tooke and Councillor Williams, as Chair and Vice-Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee, both declared in interest in Agenda item 11: *Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel*; they will abstain from the vote for this item.

The Mayor, as county councillor for St Mark's and St Peter's, and Councillor Pineger, as borough councillor for St Mark's, both declared an interest in Agenda item 10:

Interim review of polling districts, polling places, and polling stations for St Mark's Ward

The Mayor also suggested that all parish councillors have an interest in Agenda item 9: *Community Governance Review - Stage 1 results and recommendations*, but this would not preclude them from taking part in the debate and voting on the recommendations.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 21 July, were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor began by expressing condolences to the families of Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz, who were killed in the Yom Kippur terrorist attack on the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Manchester. He said he understood how concerning this will be for the Jewish communities in Cheltenham, and had a simple message – there is no place for antisemitism, not here, not anywhere.

He said that on 02 October a number of councillors attended the funeral of former Mayor and Honorary Alderman Brian Chaplin. Not having served with him, he could do no more than offer condolences to his family and friends, but he invited any members who had worked with him to say a few words should they wish.

Councillor Horwood said he knew Brian during his time as MP and councillor, and although they agreed on nothing politically, always found him a funny and congenial character. He added that he was an outstanding harmonica player, and latterly a committed fundraiser for prostate cancer, making a huge contribution.

The Mayor invited everyone to stand for a minute's silence.

A list of events attended by the Mayor since the last meeting of Council can be found [here](#) on the CBC website.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader shared an update of just some of the activity and events since the last meeting of Full Council on 21 July:

- the council completed the first 10 of 70 new affordable homes at the Regents Village site in Swindon Village, making a significant step in addressing our local housing needs;

- Henry Boot Developments have appointed a contractor for the £1billion Golden Valley scheme near GCHQ, which is set to transform the area into a tech and innovation hub;
- Cheltenham joined the national *Rescue Me! Recycle* campaign from 22-28 September, promoting recycling awareness and community engagement;
- Horizon Aero Group, the preferred bidder for Gloucestershire Airport, unveiled a Social Value Charter outlining its commitment to sustainability and community benefit;
- nominations have opened for the 2025 No Child Left Behind awards, celebrating individuals and organisations who are making a difference for children and families in Cheltenham;
- the Community Pride 2025 programme has been launched, offering a total fund of £30k to support local community-led projects that boost neighbourhood pride and cohesion.

Looking forward to the December meeting, she hoped to be able to share the results of our 2025 Residents Survey for debate, together with an update to council on the sale of the Municipal Offices and Gloucestershire Airport.

She ended by encouraging all members to attend the member briefings on Local Government Review. It is a huge commitment, and there will be a special Full Council meeting in November to agree the submission to government. She put on record her thanks to all the officers working on this enormous piece of work.

6 To receive petitions

There were no petitions.

7 Public Questions

Seven public questions had been received, with written responses published on the website. Three of the questioners were present to ask supplementary questions.

1. Question from Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Data Centres and Water Use

National frameworks for water management, such as the *National Framework for Water Resources 2025* and the *Plan for Water*, focus largely on regulating water companies and supply infrastructure. They do not set sector-specific safeguards for high-demand industrial users such as data centres, whose cooling systems can place significant pressure on local water resources.

Given Cheltenham Borough Council's responsibilities as the Local Planning Authority, what steps will the council take to ensure that any future planning application for a data centre in our borough:

1. Includes clear and enforceable conditions on water use, abstraction, and discharge;
2. Demonstrates that local residents and businesses will not lose out to industrial users in the event of water shortages; and
3. Remains subject to local oversight and enforcement, even if data centres are later reclassified as nationally significant infrastructure projects?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

It is not possible to pre-judge a future planning application as the issues that may or may not arise cannot be accurately predicted. Please be assured however that the issues that you have raised, where material, will be weighed into the planning balance as part of any planning decision and expert advice will be sought where necessary (from the Environment Agency for example). Conditions will be imposed where the legal tests are met. Responsibility for enforcement matters will remain with the borough council irrespective of whether a data centre is classified as a 'nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP)' in the future.

2. Question from Mr Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Fracking and Local Protections

While the Government has paused support for hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), national energy policy continues to describe it as a possible future option. The National Planning Policy Framework allows certain major energy projects to be designated as *Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects*, which can override local planning controls and community objections.

Given Cheltenham Borough Council's responsibilities as the Local Planning Authority, what steps will the council take to ensure that if fracking proposals were brought forward affecting Cheltenham or its surrounds:

1. Local environmental protections, including groundwater safety and air quality, cannot be set aside;
2. Biodiversity net gain and nature recovery requirements are fully enforced; and
3. The health, safety, and concerns of local residents remain central to the council's decision-making, even if national policy seeks to override local control?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

Hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') does not currently sit under the nationally significant infrastructure (NSIP) regime; a conventional planning application is therefore a requirement.

Dealing with and determining a planning application for fracking (and associated enforcement) is currently the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council in its capacity as Minerals Planning Authority (MPA). The borough council's role in this scenario is one of consultee only.

It is not the borough council's role to duplicate the planning process underway at the county council, but in the event that such an application is ever submitted, we will of course represent the views and opinions of Cheltenham residents through our role as a statutory consultee.

The particular considerations that you have raised in your question (environmental factors/biodiversity etc.) are legitimate planning considerations which the county council will need to take into account in the event that an application for fracking is submitted.

3. Question from Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Open Space, Councillor Izaak Tailford

In recent weeks, a number of popular Restaurants and Cafes in Cheltenham have closed such as Ask in Montpellier, Ox in Cambray, and Cake Alchemist, Domain 16 and The Find in Regent Street.

What steps is the Council taking to support businesses of this type in these difficult Economic times and to attract new businesses to invest in our Town?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question. As both a resident and cabinet member for the economy, I was disappointed to hear about the recent closures of these well-loved restaurants and cafés in Cheltenham. The retail and hospitality sectors are facing significant national challenges and, as an authority, we recognise the impact this has on our businesses, their staff, and the wider economy.

Many of the businesses you have mentioned have cited factors outside the council's control in their reasons for closing. This has included business rates, which are set nationally, increasing rent, which is set by landlords, and wider economic pressures such as rising costs of materials.

With this in mind, I want to reassure you that locally we are committed to doing everything we can to support local businesses and attract new investment into Cheltenham.

Some of our activities include:

Place marketing and promotion:

The council's Marketing Cheltenham team promotes the town to both residents and visitors as a vibrant place to visit, stay, and explore. Around 2 million people visit Cheltenham each year.

All visitor facing businesses are promoted on www.visitcheltenham.com for free and this website also hosts the biggest what's on guide in the town. It is a useful source of information and well used by visitors and residents with over 1 million visitors a year.

I took part in the regular Marketing Cheltenham meeting last week, where member businesses get together to promote and network – as well as having the opportunity to learn about the upgraded Visit Cheltenham website and how its changes will make it easier for them to promote themselves to visitors and residents.

Marketing Cheltenham are also the conduit for promoting the town to investors with our Moving to Cheltenham brand highlighting the many reasons to bring a business to the town.

Strong partnerships:

We work closely with Cheltenham Business Improvement District (BID) to support initiatives that enhance the town centre experience, including events, street dressing, and safety.

There are plenty of examples where we have worked together recently on things such as their town centre graffiti removal programme, public realm improvements, the Cambray Carnival for families and young people, and of course the Cheltenham and Gloucester Hospitals Charity Lions at Large trail, that brought many visitors and residents into our town centre during the summer.

This is a good opportunity to also say that I do hope that businesses in the BID area will back them in their latest ballot, so we can continue to work together going forward. They do a fantastic job and represent businesses very well.

We also work with other business groups including the Chamber of Commerce to support businesses across the town as a whole.

Support for start-ups and entrepreneurs:

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the council funds business support via the Growth Hub. Based at the MX, the team offer free advice to businesses at all stages of their development and in all sectors.

I visited the Growth Hub last week, and I would highly recommend that businesses reach out to them for free support, advice and workshops.

Town centre vacant units action plan

Between 8 and 9% of the retail premises in Cheltenham town centre are currently vacant. This compares to a national average of around 14%. However, we are not complacent and our vacant units action plan sets out a list of actions and priorities to support town centre businesses.

Culture

It would be remiss of me to not mention all of our support, both financially and in-kind, for our cultural sector in Cheltenham – including, but not limited to, The Wilson, Town Hall, The Everyman, Cheltenham Festivals and Cheltenham Playhouse too.

All of these venues and organisations are a focal point and bring many visitors and residents into our town centre, boosting our hospitality industry and making our Festival Town a great place to live and work. This helps us punch far above our size as a town.

To summarise - we understand the pressures facing the hospitality sector and remain committed to promoting the town and working collaboratively with our partners to support businesses. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight a slice of what we are doing as a council – but to also help signpost businesses to available support where they need it.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your full response – it is helpful to get this information out. Would you agree that it is worrying that so many well-established businesses are closing and that this might be a trend? You are right to say that we mustn't be complacent, especially with the important months ahead leading up to Christmas. The upcoming budget is a concern, with possible increase in taxation at national level that might affect these businesses, but I will do what I can to support them in the future to ensure that Cheltenham is well marketed as a great place to run a business.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the original question which provided a good opportunity to highlight just some of what we do as a council to support local businesses. One of the biggest challenges has been 14 years of hardship and austerity under the previous government, and while not agreeing with all the current government is doing, it is to be hoped that some of its changes, such as the new minimum wage, will make a difference to how affordable a business is to run.

Whilst it is a worrying trend nationally, I am not worried for Cheltenham because we do such a good job, and our vacancy levels are lower than elsewhere in the county and country. But we have to be vigilant, not complacent, to look after our town, working hard and putting pressure on nationally to hopefully push forward changes which will benefit our local businesses.

Although we have lost some businesses, we have gained some too, partly thanks to the hard work of Cheltenham BID under new director Fran Inman, working with the council. New businesses may also benefit from The Growth Hub which provides help, free explanations and support .

4. Question from Rich Newman to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Does Cheltenham Borough council currently offer any particular protections for rare historic buildings and the businesses housed within them in our town? In short, does the council make any allowances for historic business/premises?

Cabinet Member response

Historic buildings which are deemed by Historic England to be of special architectural or historic significance are 'listed' on the National Heritage List for England. Listed buildings benefit from an enhanced level of protection; this means that any physical change which might affect its special interest requires the council's prior consent through the planning system. The protection provided by the 'listed building consent' regime does not however extend to the use of the building or changes from one business to another. Any physical works to a listed building which facilitate or encompass an associated change of use would however fall within the council's control.

Businesses accommodated within a listed building are subject to the same planning policies as those within an unlisted or non-historic building. The planning system does not provide protection for specific businesses; it does however provide a level of protection for certain commercial uses in a very limited and specific set of circumstances (for example protection for retail/commercial uses in a high street) where doing so is deemed to be in the wider public interest.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for the initial response. The Bell Inn dates back to 1809 and the previous planning application resulted in it being designated as an asset of community value, which was much appreciated. Does the council agree that the petition and public support gathered last time also applies to the current planning proposal, as the 'Save The Bell' campaign sees this as an ongoing issue rather than a new issue.

Cabinet Member response

[The Mayor made the point that questions about specific planning applications yet to be determined are not allowed as any response could be viewed as pre-determination, resulting in costs to the public purse.]

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control apologised for not having thanked the questioner for his original question, but said he could only provide a limited response in view of the Mayor had said about pre-determination.]

It is difficult to respond directly to the question without making any specific reference to The Bell Inn, but the main thing to remember is that historic buildings are protected by their listed building status, and this is taken into consideration when assessing planning applications. The council wants to make sure that the town's historical assets are protected, and I can assure the questioner that they will be, under the listed building system.

[The Mayor added that members of the public concerned about any planning application can make formal representations through the planning process if they wish.]

5. Question from Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Around four years ago CBC installed an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) as part of the upgrade to the Burrow's Pavilion. At that time, it was the first such installation in any of the parks in the Borough. It has transpired that the ASHP is not fit for purpose with running costs amounting to an unsustainable £6k-£7k per annum and has insufficient capacity to run the building. It seems that the contractor appointed under the CBC tender program had limited understanding of the technology. Furthermore, no form of guarantee as to its efficient performance is in place. Consequently, the ASHP now requires replacement at a cost to Leckhampton Rovers Football Club. The new ASHP will have running costs around £1.5k per annum.

Questions: Why was due diligence on suitability of contractor/supplier of original ASHP not carried out? Why is there no guarantee in place? How many other CBC parks have ASHP's in place and if so, have these been fitted by the same contractor?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the question. Firstly, I think we need to acknowledge the success of Burrow's Pavilion and how the investment overall has supported sport and physical activity to thrive on Burrow's Field which is to the significant benefit to the local community and to Cheltenham.

With regard to the ASHP itself, I think we need to establish the facts. It is not correct that due diligence was not carried out on the contractors. In fact, the works were awarded to an established, reputable and well-known local contractor and this was overseen again by an established and respected local firm as contract administrator on behalf of CBC.

However, it is often the case on any construction project that, following the completion of works, issues arise when a facility becomes operational.

In this case, CBC property team are currently in contact with the contractors to acquire warranty information for the installed equipment as this may enable a claim to be made for any credible defects. In addition, the council are also supporting the club to get a further mechanical and electrical assessment of the equipment. We hope through this support we can move towards reaching a positive resolution.

There are no other ASHPs in Council pavilions. There is one further ASHP in Montpellier Gardens Gallery but this was instigated, installed and is managed by the tenant.

Supplementary Question

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for a full response, and it is good to know that, contrary to what I had been led to believe, there does seem to be a warranty in place for the ASHP, which hasn't been working properly and has been costing £6-7k a year. How confident is the Cabinet Member that the warranty will be successful,

what extent of original cost four years ago will be forthcoming, and what was original cost?

Cabinet Member response

This is quite a lot of detail, and a written response will be provided as soon as possible. In the meantime, I would like to put on record my thanks to that community for all their hard work.

6. Question from Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the current number of void council properties in Cheltenham, the average time these properties are standing empty, and how many of these are classified as long-term voids—empty for over 60 days?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question. It is important to note that when providing information on the number and costs of void properties we are not dealing with static numbers, for example since April 2025 the council has received 118 terminations and has acquired new stock which also count as voids before being let.

As of 30 September, the council held a total of 127 void properties as follows:

0-3 weeks = 21

4-12 weeks =32

13+ weeks =74

In addition, we have 18 properties which are currently advertised and going through the lettings process.

We fully accept that there have been substantial delays in the turnaround times for our void properties.

However, these delays were due to serious governance and legal issues which had not been addressed by the previous executive team or board and were therefore only identified following the transfer from Cheltenham Borough Homes. As a result, it was necessary to put a stop on all void work for several months so that the right changes could be made so the council could achieve compliance.

Now that these issues have been resolved and new contractors procured, work is progressing to bring the number down quickly. Due to our new performance management approach, we have seen the number fall by 14% since July.

7. Question from Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

Given the loss of rental income from void properties, can the Council provide a detailed estimate of the total financial loss to the Housing Revenue Account from these voids since the management of council homes was brought back in-house? And what is the current monthly cost to the public purse of housing families in temporary accommodation, a cost that would be significantly reduced if these voids were brought back into use?

Cabinet Member response

The void rent loss for the 2024/25 financial year was £456,600 which represents a rent loss of 1.8% and for 2025/26 the void rent loss to date is £335,000 representing a rent loss of 2.64%.

As mentioned in the response to your previous question, as a result of serious governance and legal issues which had not been addressed by the previous executive team or CBH board prior to transfer it has been necessary to put a stop on all void work for several months so that the right changes could be made to ensure that the council achieves compliance.

Now that we are in a position where contractors have been lawfully procured and appropriate financial controls put in place the position on voids will be recovered. To that end I am pleased to report that due to the interventions made performance is already improving in bringing void numbers down, with a 14% reduction since July 2025.

It is also important to note that, despite this council having to take action to put right the legacy issues left by CBH, that we continue to move forward with delivering significant savings and efficiencies which can then be reinvested in the service to the benefit of our tenants, leaseholders and the houses they live in. None of this would have been possible without the Council taking the right decision to bring the service back in house.

8 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

9 Community Governance Review - Stage 1 results and recommendations

Introducing the report, the Leader made the following points:

- local government reorganisation, with the abolition of all Gloucestershire's seven district and borough councils, will leave areas of Cheltenham outside the existing five parishes without any real local representation – hence the agreement to undertake a community governance review. Stage 1 ran from May to July, and

since then officers and members of the Community Governance Review working group have developed the recommendations outlined in the report;

- about 100 responses were received, largely through an online survey, with some more detailed proposals sent by email. It is important to understand the views of the public, community groups and various organisations within Cheltenham, and she put on record her thanks to everyone who has contributed so far, assuring them that any feedback on how to improve offline communications for Stage 2 of the consultation is being taken on board;
- Stage 1 has resulted in no clear consensus or specific proposal that can be presented as the finished article for Stage 2, so today's recommendations are essentially proposing a review of certain parishes and their surrounding areas, based on the survey responses and proposals provided, in addition to asking the public for their views on the development of any new parish or town council.

She said that since the publication of the report, a few questions have been asked, and she went on to highlight a few corrections and points of clarification in the report

- regarding how Stage 2 of the consultation will be conducted with no additional financial implications, she said it will be largely along the same lines as Stage 1 but that paper copies of the documents will be made available, and the offline element of the consultation will be improved where possible. It is not economic to email or send printed leaflets to every household, but is really important that we as local representatives and councillors do as much as possible through various channels to keep people informed;
- paragraph 2.7 of the covering reports notes that a community governance review can make changes to parishes not looking to change; it has been pointed out that this is confusing, and the report and public consultation website will be amended accordingly
- there are some minor formatting issues in the report which means the recommendations in the summary don't reflect those at the end of the report or in the covering report – these will also be amended;
- following conflicting feedback from Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council, it has now been agreed that a complete review of that parish is needed and a recommendation to that effect has been added.

Questions

In response to Members' questions, the Leader confirmed that:

- the first round of consultation was always going to be tricky, as people would be faced with a blank piece of paper and have no real sense of what any changes would mean to them. She anticipated that Stage 2 would be more inclusive, providing more detailed information and recommendations, and therefore get a better response;
- the Monitoring Officer confirmed that there would be no minimum number of required responses for any recommendations to be enacted, but it would ultimately be for Members at Full Council to determine whether they were satisfied that the responses were enough to move forward with a reorganisation order;

- regarding what the general population may know or not know about local democracy, she was not intending to include anything about local government reorganisation in the community governance review, but could see that a lot of people were not engaged and, for example, didn't understand the differentiation between town and parish councils. She hadn't considered producing any short form videos or Facebook posts to improve understanding to date, but was happy to take this suggestion away for a conversation with the communications team;
- the Monitoring Officer said the only real legal difference between town and parish councils is that a town council can appoint a mayor should it wish, while a parish council cannot; otherwise their powers and responsibilities are effectively the same;
- it is not the government's intention to allow town and parish councils to take on the responsibilities of borough councils. She had not heard anything from the county council about its expectations around town councils, but could pick this up off-line with the Member.

Debate

Members welcomed the report, looked forward to the second stage of consultation, and made the following comments:

- the report is warmly welcomed and supported; we still have powers over community governance, and the council is paying proper attention to this tier of government, to ensure it is more immediate, accountable and cost effective. The comments regarding Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council are particularly welcome – that area provided the best response in the town, with strong support for a boundary review to include Pilley (which merged with Leckhampton in the early 20th century and feels itself to be part of the parish) and Bournside (with its strong connections with Warden Hill and already part of Warden Hill district at county level) making them both a logical fit with the parish. He strongly supports these two areas becoming part of Leckhampton with Warden Hill parish, though is aware that there may be increased staffing requirements for such a large area;
- the results of the Stage 1 consultation clearly highlight the requirement for a number of reviews of existing parishes, to either include previously-excluded parts or to move things round a bit – the opportunity to look at this is welcome, though any suggestion that a boundary line could be put along the railway line would not work, as this would cut through the heart of St Peter's ward;
- it is clear that, after potential boundary reviews and inclusions, and a potential new parish of Benhall and The Reddings, the majority of what is left will include Cheltenham's highest areas of multiple deprivation, as well as the town centre, with its many assets and green spaces enjoyed by all residents and visitors alike. Management oversight and responsibility and the associated precepts in this large town centre area would be disproportionately unfair, and raises the question of how town centre assets can be managed collectively;
- having tried and failed for three years to set up a neighbourhood forum in St Peter's, in an effort to secure more CIL funds for local projects, and noting a similar lack of success in West Cheltenham, Springbank and Hester's Way,

recruiting members for a parish council is likely to be just as difficult – how will these residents be represented?

- support for a town council will ensure that non-parished areas don't get left behind, but the town centre include areas of deprivation and it will be important work together and share issues across boundaries;
- another concern is how people will know what is going on in the next stage – it is important that local councillors help them to understand the difference between a town and a borough council, and explain what the changes will mean to them – just describing it as 'a different level of government' is not very meaningful for most people;
- with local government reorganisation coming and the possibility of one unitary council, it is particularly important to have town and parish councils representation for the whole of Cheltenham, as there will be fewer ward councillors to help people with small but important local matters. Tewkesbury and Cirencester already have town councils and Cheltenham should have similar local representation for its residents to make sure they're not left behind when big decisions are made at higher level;
- the only caveat here is that potential unitary divisional or ward boundary issues should be considered when looking at boundaries for parish and town councils to avoid any confusion for people as to where they actually live and who represents them – this must be aligned as much as possible;
- Swindon Village is a perfect example of this – a ward separated by two parish councils and an unparished area, which causes confusion and some irritation to residents. If the council is considering Wyman's Brook, Prestbury and Swindon Village as part of the review for the second stage, it would make more sense, and result in better representation and community cohesion if a single parish council covers the whole of Swindon Village ward. Without this, some important areas of Swindon Village ward will suffer from a lack of local representation as we move towards a unitary authority, including some of the most deprived parts which need significant funding and improvements to ensure they are not left behind. The council should be doing all it can to make sure those areas are represented and funded through a parish council, by extending it to the full extent of ward, and allocating funding for these areas;
- the local government review seems like a dilution of democracy and devaluation of communities – it feels like local democracy is being torn apart – and while some wards such as Springbank are strong communities, many residents are time-poor wary of the reviews, and not engaging. Some kind of town council is needed to represent these people;
- the important word here is 'community' – we all represent our communities, and we must continue to put them and their engagement first when considering the way forward. Swindon Village has a strong parish council which engages with people, brings them together, works hard for the village, and makes things happen. When signs were put up in Windyridge Road, announcing that it was part of Prestbury parish, residents were angry at the lack of consultation, as they felt themselves to be part of Swindon Village. These voices must be heard;
- when working on the Joint Core Strategy, it was important for residents of Swindon Village and Uckington to save areas of local green space, and representatives from both communities came together to help make this happen;

the idea that Uckington might form part of Swindon Village Parish Council is a good one. Also the impact of Elms Park will be enormous in this part of town, with many new properties on the Cheltenham side – those residents will need representation, and the parish council is already fighting for this;

- Members' comments so far have demonstrated how complicated this issue is and whether residents really understand what is happening. Fiddler's Green became part of Benhall and The Reddings ward last year, but no-one is quite sure when the boundaries are. There is an active residents association in Benhall, an embryonic one in The Reddings, and none at all in Fiddlers Green; Benhall could have its own parish, or combine with The Reddings, or even be part of Up Hatherley parish. Hopefully Stage 2 consultation will make things clearer;
- looking at the Stage 1 responses, there were a lot from Leckhampton, but only five from The Reddings, three from Benhall and none from Fiddler's Green. The council and Members need to reach out and do more, make sure people understand how any changes will affect how they are looked after. Hopefully there will be a better response in Stage 2, with more local meetings to explain this big change and how to get it right;
- councillors have a big responsibility to explain the process to residents. Parishes have a natural centre of gravity, which make it easier to reach residents and provide services, and we should be mindful of this and where residents are most likely to receive the best level of service when thinking about where any parish boundaries might go. Some streets may do better as part of a parish council, others as part of a town council – the onus is on us to decide where the dividing lines should be;
- the report is welcome, and particularly the suggestion that Benhall and The Reddings should form a parish, although there are other options. Members need to explain to their residents and communities what will be involved, and the positives of being part of a parish. There are likely to be some complications, as Benhall and The Reddings are different areas, but they want to work together going forward;
- on Appendix A, the boundary between proposed parishes F and C would be better redrawn co-terminus with the ward boundary between St Peter's and Lansdown, to avoid a very thin piece of St Peter's ward ending up in a different parish to the rest of the ward;
- we might want to encourage parishes to aspire to Quality Parish Status, which sets a good standard, ensuring the parish is well run and public money well spent.

Summing up, the Leader made the following points:

- it was nice to bring a report to Council about community, as taking care of and being part of their communities is what most councillors want to do. Whatever we do next as we move into the next stage of whatever local government becomes, we need to make sure that all areas and communities have some level of local responsibility, accountability and representation;
- a lot has been said about fairness and deprivation, and we must be mindful of all areas when considering the way forward. As discovered by the Member who found setting up a neighbourhood forum impossible, there are areas where

people care but the majority of them are not retired, not high earners, and don't have the time or capacity to engage – this is one of the big reasons for doing a review;

- the subject of remuneration has been raised, and at the Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils AGM earlier this year, many people said that this would make a difference – some form of recognition, maybe an allowance of £2-4k, in recognition of the hard work and many hours parish councillors put in to doing an efficient job;
- it is true that a parish needs a centre of gravity, a community centre where events take place, but this must be relevant and welcoming to the whole parish, not just one element of it.

She thanked Members for their comments, hoped for a positive vote, and looked forward to working with the working group on the next stage of the consultation.

Before the vote, Councillor Horwood apologised for not having declared earlier that he is a Leckhampton with Warden Hill parish councillor. Councillors Smith and Bamford are also parish councillors.

Members approved unanimously the following recommendations:

Council is recommended to review the full consultation response report (Appendix 3) and consider if the following recommendations should be taken forward for further consultation, including by way of a further survey and additional options such as focus groups:

- 1. To complete a full review of the boundaries of Swindon Village Parish and Prestbury Parish, including Wyman's Brook to establish which Parish it should sit in;**
- 2. To complete a full review of the unparished area between Prestbury and Charlton Kings to understand if it should be incorporated into one of the already established councils;**
- 3. To complete a full review of Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish, to understand whether the existing parish should be extended and/or separated into two parishes;**
- 4. To consider setting up a new Parish for Benhall and The Reddings;**
- 5. To directly ask the public, in stage 2 of the Community Governance Review, if they would like to see a Town Council in Cheltenham. This consultation question would provide an overview of what a Town Council could be responsible for and provide some options as to its boundaries.**

10 Interim review of polling districts, polling places, and polling stations for St Mark's Ward

The Returning Officer introduced the report, saying it was the council's statutory duty to ensure that all electors have reasonable and accessible facilities for voting. A full review of polling districts, places and stations was carried out in 2024, following which the function room at The Umbrella public house was designated as the polling place for polling district OA. However, following concerns from councillors about the polling station being situated outside St Mark's ward, and with further consultation, The Common Ground in Brooklyn Road (formerly St Marks and Hesters Way Community Association) has been identified as a more suitable alternative for electors in polling district OA.

He thanked borough and county councillors for aligning behind this recommendation.

A Member asked what contingency plan was in place if the polling station, which would now accommodate three polling districts, became unusable for any reason. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the Hesters Way polling station would be moved to the Oasis Sports Hall, and that an agreement is in place to have a portacabin supplier and generator on standby for the two St Mark's districts.

A Member thanked officers for the clear explanation, and welcomed the recommendations. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets also thanked officers and the elections team on behalf of all his colleagues, for their hard work all year round. The Mayor added his thanks.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the change of polling place / station for electors in polling district OA to vote at The Common Ground, Cheltenham, Brooklyn Road (formerly St Marks & Hesters Way Community Association) is approved.**

11 Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel

The Monitoring Officer began by saying that she was introducing the report in the absence of the Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), Graham Russell, who has decided to stand down from the role. She put on record her thanks to him for all his hard work, time and effort over recent years, which she said was much appreciated.

Introducing the report, she said that when the new Cabinet Housing Committee was set up a year ago, it was agreed that the allowance for the Chair and Vice-Chair would be reviewed after one year. As set out in the report, the panel felt that the special responsibility allowance (SRA) for these roles should be increased to be in line with that of regulatory committees (Planning and Licensing) and recommended that change be made.

Members were also being asked to note the allowances paid to co-optees and independent persons on Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet Housing Committee.

There were no questions from Members.

A Member said she thoroughly supported the recommendations, knowing that the amount of technical information and paperwork dealt with by the Cabinet Housing Committee is very similar to that of Planning and Licensing. She was also pleased to note that the independent persons are being fairly remunerated.

The Leader added her thanks to the outgoing Chair of the IRP and was sorry to see him go after doing this difficult job for some years. She said his vast experience and knowledge of how councils and councillors work had made an important and consistent contribution to the work of the panel, and he will be much missed.

The Mayor also added his thanks on behalf of the whole Council, saying the task of Chair was challenging and often thankless.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance of £5,363, to be backdated to the 1 October 2025;**
- 2. the Vice Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,823, to be backdated to the 1 October 2025;**
- 3. the allowances for co-optees/independent persons are noted.**

12 2024-25 Audit, Compliance and Governance Annual Report

The Chair of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee introduced the report, which he felt provided a useful insight into the work of the committee, highlighting the excellent work of finance and audit colleagues, risk management, counter fraud and enforcement, cyber security and governance matters. He thanked them and officers for their input to the report, and councillor colleagues for their contributions and questions. He explained that the apparent late sign-off of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 accounts was not due to any tardiness of the accounts team, but to a massive national external audit backlog – it will be a couple of years until this is back on track.

No vote was required, but he hoped that Members found the report useful, and was happy to help with any points of clarification.

A Member thanked the Chair of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee for an excellent job in chairing the committee over the last year, dealing with dense and technical material with focus and moving through the agendas efficiently. Another Member of the committee commented that he always particularly enjoys the reports of the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit, who do a huge amount of work to prevent public money from being syphoned off, and also the cyber security team for their really important work. He thanked the Chair and all the officers for their hard work.

As set out in the Recommendation, **no vote was required** but Council noted the Audit, Compliance and Governance Annual Report 2024-25

13 2024-25 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny presented the report, thanking Councillor Foster who has occasionally stepped in to chair a meeting. She also drew Members' attention to an error in the report which stated that Councillor Barrell was a member of the committee in 2024-25; she was not, and this will be corrected before publication.

She said Overview and Scrutiny has had a busy year with an ambitious agenda set by Members, under the much-appreciated guidance of the Head of Governance, Risk and Assurance. She was also grateful to the Democratic Services team, who organise and liaise with all parties to ensure the items discussed meet the set objectives.

The chart shows how the committee interacts with the council and other committees, receiving reports from some and making recommendations to others. It has a wide-ranging and flexible remit to reflect current items of interest and concern, meets twice a year to set and prioritise agenda items, and appreciates dialogue with Members who report back from other scrutiny groups. She thanked officers for their expertise and time in preparing and presenting papers and answering challenging questions – Members don't underestimate the time and attention they give to the process, together with Cabinet Members.

Going forward she said Overview and Scrutiny Committee now includes two external members to offer further scrutiny of the items discussed, and looked forward to their future input.

A Member thanked the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny on behalf of Chair, for taking on leadership of this committee, saying it is a massive undertaking and huge amount of work.

A Member thanked the Vice-Chair for the report, and said she was looking forward to reporting to Overview and Scrutiny on all the ongoing work undertaken during No Child Left Behind's Year of Youth Action. She also asked Members to note that as part of the council's work to tackle multi deprivation, and the problems faced locally and nationally with school attendance, she had met today with representatives from local junior and senior schools to consider how this can be challenged through NCLB effort.

The Leader thanked members of Overview and Scrutiny and for their work in keeping things on track, and, as a regular attendee at meetings, knew how much work Members put in to holding the council to account for its actions.

The Mayor thanked Members of opposition groups who sit on Overview and Scrutiny Committee, saying that with such a large majority on the Council, it is essential that the Cabinet is held to account for its decisions, and that best practice is followed by appointing a Chair from who is not a member of the main group. He thanked officers who support the committee and provide information.

The Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny thanked Members for their comments.

As set out in the Recommendation, **no vote was required** but Council noted the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25

14 Notice of Motions

There were none.

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

There were none.

16 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

Before going into exempt session to approve the exempt minutes of the previous meeting, the Mayor asked if any Member were intending to make any amendments for the minutes. As there were none, it was confirmed by the Monitoring Officer that there was no need to move into exempt session.

17 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 21 July were approved as a true record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.