

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 27 February 2026

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 4.20 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Dr David Willingham (Chair), Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Julia Chandler, Mike Collins, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Hannah Healy, Sandra Holliday, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Dr Cathal Lynch, Ben Orme, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships) and Jon Whitlock (Head of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer))

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Clucas, Davies, Lewis, Oliver and Sankey.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2025 were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor had shared a list of recent mayoral engagements with Members, noting the breadth and variety of events attended.

He shared the following news:

- the recent No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Awards were a great success, and he welcomed to the chamber two of the officers involved – Richard Gibson and Maisie Fowler - thanking them for their hard work and dedication to improving the lives of children across the borough through this scheme. He invited Members to show their appreciation with a round of applause;
- congratulations to Councillor Tailford, who has recently become a father.

He went on to share with Members the sad news that former Councillor Barbara Driver has recently passed away. She served as a Conservative Borough Councillor for Lansdown Ward from 1999 to 2024, was Mayor of Cheltenham in 2011–12, a member of both Planning and Overview & Scrutiny Committees, and subsequently an Honorary Alderman. The Mayor recognised her long and dedicated service to the borough, and although he did not personally serve at the same time, he extended condolences on behalf of the Council to her family and friends. Members observed a minute's silence in her honour.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader provided several updates for Members' attention:

- the government has launched a consultation on the development of a Spatial Development Strategy and has also requested views on the potential formation of strategic authorities as a precursor to mayoral devolution arrangements. She reaffirmed CBC's preference to align with the West of England Combined Authority, as economic and cultural evidence demonstrates that Cheltenham's natural links and strategic direction look southward rather than the Midlands. This position will continue to be strongly represented to government;
- the government has announced £63m in additional capacity funding to support Local Government Reorganisation, although allocation details have not yet been issued. She said the council will lobby robustly to ensure Cheltenham's interests are heard and that the borough receives an appropriate share of funding, as LGR has been and continues to be a significant drain on resources. Since the publication of the 2024 LGR White Paper, the national process has lacked clarity and coherence, but CBC remains committed to fighting for the best interests of Cheltenham's residents throughout the process;
- ahead of the future inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing, the council commissioned an external mock inspection; the feedback received was positive and confirmed progress towards full compliance with consumer standards. This supports the council's ambition as set out in the Corporate Plan, and confirms that it is on track to complete its housing improvement programme and achieve a

C1 rating by the end of its term. She offered particular thanks to Claire Hughes for her leadership and efforts in reaching this stage.

She ended by congratulating Councillor Tailford who has recently become a father.

6 To receive petitions

There were no petitions.

7 Public Questions

Three public questions had been received from two questioners, one of whom was present to ask a supplementary question. The published questions and responses were taken as read:

1. Question from Trevor Witton-Bourke to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

Cheltenham Borough Council has confirmed that it has expressed an interest in participating in the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Pilots scheme. Under what governance route was this expression of interest authorised (for example Cabinet decision, individual Cabinet Member decision, or delegated officer authority), and were elected members formally informed prior to submission?

Member response

Thank you for your question.

The expression of interest in the Home Office pilot scheme was submitted by officers in line with the council's scheme of delegation. As Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, I am proud that Cheltenham is a Town of Sanctuary and that we continue to welcome refugees and migrants. I therefore fully support the decision taken by officers.

It is important to emphasise that submitting an expression of interest does not commit the council to participating in the scheme, even if Cheltenham were to be selected. Any decision to proceed would be subject to further consideration.

2. Question from Trevor Witton-Bourke to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

If Cheltenham is accepted into the pilot, will participation be brought to Cabinet or Full Council for formal consideration before implementation, and what arrangements will be put in place to ensure transparency and public reporting as further information becomes available?

Member response

Thank you for your question.

If Cheltenham is invited to take part in the Home Office pilot, any decision to participate would be brought through the appropriate democratic route in line with the council's constitution. At this stage, we do not have any detail of the pilot and therefore it is not possible to confirm what that route will be.

We are committed to ensuring openness and transparency throughout this process. Should the pilot progress, we will establish clear arrangements for sharing information with elected members and the public.

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

The recent Audit report from Bishop Fleming raises many concerns including, but not limited to:

- Reference to disclaimed audit opinion by previous auditors over the 2022/23 statement of accounts
- Unable to complete work due to delay in finalising financial statements and quality of said statements
- Anticipate issuing disclaimed audit opinion due to lack of assurances over opening balances
- Unable to complete work on valuation of land and buildings (and Council dwellings), investment properties, and heritage assets

Given these concerns, particularly with regards to valuations of assets and of both opening and current balances, how confident is the council of the asset values in the 2026/2027 budget, and how much has been allowed within the budget should any re-statement of asset values or opening balances be required once the audit is completed? This is considered particularly key given the importance of secure financial status as we head into any unitary arrangements.

Member response

Thank you for your question.

It is widely recognised that the local government audit process has been under considerable pressure over the last few years which has resulted in a backlog of audits and seen the introduction of the statutory audit backstop date of the end of February. The position we find ourselves in is not ideal. Bishop Fleming have stated that they plan to build back assurance in 2025/26 by testing the 31 March 2026 year-end balance on all of the assets. We have now carried out the full

revaluation of our assets and are expecting a markedly improved position for 2025/26 external audit.

Supplementary question

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his comments, although I would refer to my original question – *“How much has been allowed in the budget should any re-statement of asset values or opening balances be required once the audit is completed?”* This is not covered by his comments made in response.

It seems as though you are explaining the current external audit problems in Cheltenham as due to the government audit process, but not to worry, Cheltenham will be okay because they will sort it out when they do the end of March '26 Audit.

So - given Bishop Fleming will not report on the 25/26 audit until early 2027, what mitigation measures have been put in place to make sure there is robust internal auditing and accounting? And, given the Cabinet Member's comment *“We have now carried out the full revaluation of our assets”* can he say whether that includes the Airport and, if so, is this the reason why the sale of the airport is still very uncertain with many deadlines missed?

Cabinet Member response

There is no allowance in the budget for the airport. This is a paperwork and communication issue, not a cost issue, arising from the situation all over the country with auditors and organisations like ourselves.

Regarding robustness, the audit committee is better placed to answer that question – maybe the questioner should ask questions at that committee, where full examination of the process take place.

8 Member Question

One Member question was received:

1. Question from Councillor Suzanne Williams to the Cabinet Member Major Developments and Housing Delivery, Councillor Alisha Lewis

A recent Green party leaflet delivered in my area referred to the Cyber Park as a vanity project.

Given that the Golden Valley project will build on our town's strength as a centre for cyber and technology, bring thousands of new jobs to the town, and include over a thousand new homes, including affordable homes, does the cabinet member agree with me that the description of this as a vanity project is a long way off the mark and that it will bring a much-needed economic boost to the west of the town and to Cheltenham as a whole?

Member response

I'd like to thank Councillor Williams for the question.

GCHQ's association with Cheltenham dates back to the 1950s. Today thousands of people in our town work for GCHQ or in the defence and security supply chain, helping to deliver GCHQ's central mission of keeping the UK safe. Because of this, technology, security and cyber industries represent a significant, vital and growing part of our local economy. Delivering the Golden Valley Development and the National Cyber Innovation Centre – named IDEA, was included as a commitment within the National Cyber Strategy and it also forms part of the delivery plan for the National Industrial Strategy making it recognised by government as a key to both our security and our economy.

But more than that, the seven decades relationship between Cheltenham, GCHQ and our national security sector has fundamentally shaped and influenced our town. Employees working to keep us safe are our residents, our community our constituents. In many cases they are even family members. Almost everyone in Cheltenham will be related to, work with or know someone who works in a role that helps to keep us safe. So instead of the Green Party choosing words like 'vanity project', which only serve to insult to all those who work so hard to protect us, what all councillors should be doing is recording our thanks to all those people who live and work in Cheltenham who are committed to combatting the very real threats that this country faces, just as we did when awarded GCHQ the freedom of the borough in 2019.

In terms of the opportunity the Golden Valley Development presents, when completed this new district in Cheltenham will have created thousands of high-quality jobs and hundreds of more social and affordable homes which local people will be able to take advantage. As a councillor, I am still struck by how challenging circumstances are for many families and communities, particularly in the west of Cheltenham. This highlights just how important it is to make sure that Golden Valley can provide more opportunities for local people to secure good jobs, get on the housing ladder and feel the benefit of the prosperity and success that Golden Valley can provide.

Because of its importance to the national security of our country, the delivery of Golden Valley should be a non-political issue where there is cross party consensus. That's why it's disappointing that with its recent leaflets and slogans, the Green Party is only demonstrating that they don't understand or don't care about our town and the fundamental role it plays in our national security. But more than that, it shows everyone that the Green Party is anti those who work to keep us safe, anti-jobs and anti-aspiration.

Supplementary question

If anyone else challenges us on what we're doing, will they get a similar response?

Member response:

I will respond accordingly as and when questions come in, in an open, honest and transparent way, though not necessarily respond to every challenge.

9 General Fund Revenue and Capital - Final Budget Proposals 2026/27

Presenting the General Fund Revenue and Capital budget proposals for 2026-27, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets described it as not just a financial report but a moral statement about who we are, what we value, and what kind of Cheltenham we are determined to build. He said budgets are about choices, priorities and people, and this budget is being set at a time of real pressure for local government, with costs rising and the demand for service not eased – these are the fragile financial and economic conditions under which the council is working. Despite the government's promise of stability and long-term funding, district councils have more responsibility without stable funding. CBC takes that responsibility seriously but the national system is broken and local government is working in uncertainty.

He said CBC has not stepped back or lowered its ambitions however, and through careful stewardship, evidence and strong values can now present a balanced financial plan which protects frontline services and supports the most vulnerable. We have worked methodically, made difficult decisions where needed, always focussed on doing the right thing for Cheltenham and its residents. We want to make it a place of opportunity, which can grow sustainably, protect its most vulnerable, push forward climate action for future generations, and prioritise community wellbeing.

He commended the budget to the Council.

Member questions

In response to Member questions, Cabinet Members said that:

- Golden Valley is a complex and long-term project and a huge commitment, which will result in both regional and national benefits. CBC is trying its best to leverage assurances and support from the government;
 - the planning overspend results from restructuring of the department over several years, and the ongoing struggle to recruit planners in the face of a national shortage. The department has now been reorganised and has recruited a number of staff, so although there appears to be an overspend now, when taken with the last 3-4 years of underspend, probably balances out to a neutral position overall;
 - the underspend in Building Control is due to the fact that it is a shared, commercial service with Tewkesbury Borough Council and its market share has recently risen hugely, bringing in a lot more income than expected. A budget must set out what the service will cost to deliver, but so far this year income has been greater expenditure – which demonstrates that we provide a good service.
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The Mayor put on record his thanks to the finance team for delivering the budget in such difficult and unprecedented circumstances.

Statements by group leaders

On behalf of the Green Party, Councillor Joy acknowledged that continued economic uncertainty makes it particularly hard to pitch the budget at this time. They welcomed the budget, and had no amendments on this occasion, making the following comments:

- as a member of the dynamic and inquisitive Budget Scrutiny Working Group, it has been good and useful to examine issues as they come in and submit ideas throughout the budget process;
- a number of elements of the budget are particularly welcome, including extension of the working-age council tax support scheme that extends the income band levels for families of more than two children which aligns with the removal of the two-child benefit cap, commitment to Net Zero by 2030, and providing for highly-valued officers and staff members;
- given current circumstances around local government reorganisation, it is good to hear that the Leader is campaigning for funding towards that.

They confirmed Green Party support for the budget.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the PAB councillor also thanked officers and Cabinet Members for their hard work, and welcomed a fair and improving budget.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets formally proposed the budget proposals for 2026-27.

Debate

Members made the following comments:

- investment in the green space team is welcomed and money well spent, with tree-planting and work on the town's green spaces very much supporting the council's Net Zero objectives; Members are encouraged to read the annual review of its work and to get involved. The team acts as enablers, project managers, and experts, helping the 20 or so volunteer groups who provide labour and work all year round to improve our parks and green space; conservative estimates puts the impact of this on the town at 15 times more than it actually costs the council, as well as improving the health and well-being of all those involved. There are plans to further expand the number of groups to areas of the town not currently served by them;
- investment in green spaces is not only very much appreciated by residents who value the town's green spaces highly, but through consideration of biodiversity and nature recovery is also highly important in contributing to cleaner air, reducing urban heat, and absorbing CO₂, thus addressing health inequalities. This all makes an important contribution to the thriving local economy, making Cheltenham a good place to live, work and visit;

- the additional money for planned maintenance of Cheltenham's amazing buildings is welcomed, as is the £134k investment in allotments - so important to the town and with a long waiting list – and enhancements to play areas and improvements to Sandford Park toilets;
- Golden Valley accounts for a large percentage of the budget, but will provide thousands of good-quality jobs over the years, encouraging young people to settle here rather than move away, as well as providing a high number of affordable homes. It will generate revenue for the town going forward, and the finance team must be congratulated for finding growth bids – a sign of well-managed finances;
- investment in marketing is also welcome – Fran Inman and BID do a great job together with the in-house marketing team, led by Helen Mole, which works tirelessly to encourage inward investment: the marketing growth bid is important, helping to create incredible events for the town and to attract people into Cheltenham;
- local government is at the front line, needing to provide critical services with less funding; although the three-year settlement is helpful, the labour government has not been particularly supportive, and our officers and Cabinet have done well to provide a robust budget for Cheltenham under such difficult circumstances;
- the support of the opposition groups is very welcome; Members working together to agree something so important and officers stepping up in such difficult circumstances are evidence that CBC is a kind organisation that works in harmony to address problems;
- the budget always attracts a lot of attention and should be publicly audited; Members must engage with residents and communities off line to help them understand how the council works;
- thanks to the Cabinet and to council staff across the board for all their work getting the budget here today, and for everything they deliver throughout the year – we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. We don't have a huge amount of money, and the contribution of volunteer and community groups help to make it go further.

In seconding the budget, the Leader said it had been a breath of fresh air to listen to such positive contributions from Members. What the council is actually delivering on this budget on such limited finances is remarkable, and something of which we can all be proud. She thanked Cabinet colleagues, in particular the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for leading the budget process, backed by the entire finance team. The council is very lucky to have appointed Adele Taylor as interim S151; she is a highly qualified and experienced officer across many councils since 1998. Sincere thanks are due to her, who together with Jon Whitlock and Jason Vaughan, has done a remarkable job.

She is happy to support the budget.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said it was heart-warming to hear such positive comments about the town, and he welcomed the support of the Green Party and PAB. He also thanked the finance team for stepping up, and the key committees – Budget Scrutiny Working Group, Audit, Compliance and Governance

Committee, and Asset Management Working Group - who work to make the budget better.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the revised budget for 2025/26 which is reported as part of the budget monitoring process in Section 6 and Appendix 15, is approved;**
- 2. the budget assessment by the Section 151 Officer at Appendix 2 is considered when agreeing the following recommendations;**
- 3. the final budget proposals including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council of £252.11 for the year 2026/27 based on a Band D property (an increase of 2.99%) are approved;**
- 4. the budget strategy for the delivery of savings / additional income totalling £1,053,750 at Appendix 4 is approved;**
- 5. the revenue growth items totalling £159,334 at Appendix 5 are approved;**
- 6. the capital programme at Appendix 6 is approved;**
- 7. setting the minimum level of General Fund Balances at £1.5m is approved;**
- 8. the use of reserves and general balances is approved, and the projected level of reserves, as detailed at Appendix 7, are noted;**
- 9. the programmed maintenance programme at Appendix 8 is approved;**
- 10. the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers in Appendix 9 is approved;**
- 11. the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) detailed in Appendix 10 is approved;**
- 12. the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26, including the continued payment of a living wage supplement at Appendix 11, is approved;**
- 13. the proposed fees and charges schedule for 2026/27 at Appendix 12 is approved, subject to appropriate consultation where required;**
- 14. the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy 2025/26 at Appendix 13 is approved.**

In support (unanimous) :

Councillors Allen, Andrews, Atherstone, Baker, Bamford, Barnes, Beale, Boyes, Chandler, Chelin, Garcia Clamp, Clark, Collins, Day, Dobie, Foster, Harvey, Hay, Healy, Holliday, Horwood, Jeffries, Joy, Lynch, Orme, Pemberton, Pineger, Smith, Steinhardt, Tailford, Tooke, Wheeler, Williams, Willingham

10 Housing Revenue Account - Final Budget Proposals 2026/27 and revised Forecast 2025/26

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said it was his privilege to present this budget, at the heart of which are tenants, residents, and making sure that their homes are safe, warm, and well-managed. Tenant feedback at the Cabinet Housing Committee had guided priorities, and he thanked everyone on that committee for their hard work over the last 18 months.

Residents are under financial pressure as a result of the high cost of living, and the council must invest to make sure that rent levels are affordable and living standards raised, as well as adding to the affordable housing stock at every opportunity. This is a steady, sensible plan with tenants at its heart – council housing is not a service, it is a foundation.

There were no Member questions.

A Member of the Green Group said they were pleased to have participated on Treasury Management Panel and Asset Management Working Group, to learn about decision-making, outside the housing revenue account. There were some tight decisions to be made, but the improvements in disability access and attention being given to keeping people safe and well in their homes is much appreciated. Thanks to officers for their hard work.

The PAB councillor also appreciated the work done, especially around affordable housing.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets formally proposed the HRA budgeted proposals for 2026-27 and revised forecast for 2025-26.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- as a member of housing committee, it is great to look at the numbers and the changes in movements in support of what the council has been doing and is trying to achieve – this is very much a reflection of discussions at Cabinet Housing Committee about what needs to be done. As a ‘critical friend’, the committee has seen significant improvements, but also increased costs at times; the money spent reflects what the committee wanted and it is good to see everything coming together; hopefully full implementation of stable processes will create more financial stability. We are in a good place;
- it is important to remember there is quite a correlation between areas of town with the highest statistical deprivation and where a lot of council housing stock is situated, and when looking at what we can do as a council to help people balance their budgets, encourage them to consider solar panels, insulation, and

other services which will allow them to spend less on heating and more on looking after themselves;

- as Mayor, he has seen at first hand some of the work that Cheltenham Borough Council Housing, including Enrich and work of the community investment teams, have done, investing in young people, and making a positive difference to their lives;
- it is worth reflecting where we have come from and where we have got to in the last 18 months, since the decision was made that the best way to serve residents was for CBC to take Cheltenham Borough Homes back in house. 20 years before, it was the right thing for it to become an Arms Length Management Organisation; nothing went wrong with it, but times change, and we need to grow and be proud of what we have achieved. Budgets have increased but not massively compared with what we have actually delivered for tenants. This is about people and their homes;
- CBC can be very proud of its record for building affordable homes, investing and building in sustainable locations to provide essential homes for people on the waiting lists;
- it is great to see in the capital programme the breadth of housing tenures that the council is offering, including at Monkscoft, 320 Swindon Road and S106 purchases on the open market, engaging in every way to provide great homes for Cheltenham people;
- it is also good to see the work being done towards social housing decarbonisation, such as installing heat pumps instead of gas boilers, with the aim of getting as close to the Climate Change and Nature SPDs as possible, reducing the carbon footprint and increasing biodiversity over and above the statutory requirements.

In seconding the proposal, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and whole officer team for presenting the HRA budget proposals. He was also grateful to the Chair and Members of the Housing Committee for their hard work, which has improved and strengthened the service we deliver. He repeated that the most important people are the residents and tenants who engage with us, share their brilliant ideas to improve the service, and want to be part of the journey, concluding that this budget is strong and robust, and he is delighted to have the opportunity to second it.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets agreed that this is an encompassing topic. He thanked colleagues for their kind words and observations, saying that the housing revenue account is always a balancing act between creating more homes and investing in existing homes. He was grateful to the Housing Committee for its valued input, and thanked the finance team and senior officers for their hard work and dedication.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the final HRA budget proposals for 2026/27 shown at Appendix 2 is approved;**

2. a rent increase of 4.80% is noted for social rent homes, affordable homes and shared ownership homes and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within this report has already been approved;
3. the HRA capital programme as shown at Appendix 3 and the detailed capital programme in Appendix 4 are noted;
4. the revised HRA forecast for 2025/26 and impact on the HRA balance are noted.

In support:

Councillors Allen, Andrews, Atherstone, Baker, Bamford, Barnes, Barrell, Boyes, Chandler, Chelin, Garcia Clamp, Clark, Collins, Day, Dobie, Foster, Harvey, Hay, Holliday, Horwood, Jeffries, Joy, Lynch, Orme, Pemberton, Pineger, Smith, Steinhardt, Tailford, Tooke, Wheeler, Williams, Willingham.

11 Council Tax Resolution 2026-27

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the item, which requires Members' approval of council tax levels for 2026-27. He reminded them that only 11% of the amount received goes to CBC.

There were no questions.

A Member pointed out that 11% of an average council tax bill amounts to approximately £250 a year which, though not insignificant, is increasingly difficult for the council to stretch. From this, it covers waste and recycling, green space, supporting people who need support, culture, wellbeing, Golden Valley, and all other investment in the town to make it the great place it is.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. the formal Council Tax resolution at Appendix 2 is approved and the commentary in respect of the increase in Council Tax at Paragraph 6 of Appendix 2 is noted.

In support (unanimous):

Councillors Allen, Andrews, Atherstone, Baker, Bamford, Barnes, Barrell, Boyes, Chandler, Chelin, Garcia Clamp, Clark, Collins, Day, Dobie, Foster, Harvey, Hay, Holliday, Horwood, Jeffries, Joy, Lynch, Orme, Pemberton, Pineger, Smith, Steinhardt, Tailford, Tooke, Wheeler, Williams and Willingham.

12 Council Order of Precedence - Nominations for Mayor and Deputy Mayor Elect 2026-27

The Chief Executive introduced the item, which forms an annual part of the constitution, to nominate a new Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the municipal year 2026-27 to be put forward for election at Annual and Selection Council in May. He said that the order of precedence takes on greater significance as the years go by, and CBC will only go through this process a couple more times.

He asked Members to note the nominations of Councillor Horwood for Mayor and Councillor Collins for Deputy Mayor for the municipal year ahead.

There were no questions. A Member pointed out that in the Order of Precedence, Councillor Lewis is listed as councillor St Paul's ward, which she is not.

A former Mayor was pleased to note that the electric Mayoral car introduced when he was in office, which plays an important role in the council's Net Zero ambition, is still maintained.

There were no further comments or debate.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Order of Precedence in Appendix 2 is noted;**
- 2. Councillor Martin Horwood be put to the Annual Council Meeting for election as Mayor for the Municipal year 2026-2027.**
- 3. Councillor Mike Collins be put to the Annual Council Meeting for election as Deputy Mayor for the Municipal year 2026-2027.**

13 Council Diary 2026-27

The Leader gave a brief introduction to the item which comes to Council every year. She said it is quite a logistical feat for Democratic Services to put the diary together, and thanked them for organising the many meetings. Members have had a chance to comment on the diary, and she hoped that they would support it today.

There were no questions and no debate.

The Mayor added his thanks to Democratic Services, saying that county council meetings, school holidays, and many other factors have to be worked around.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the draft Council Diary of meetings for September 2026 - August 2027 is approved.**

14 Community Governance Review Update

The Leader reminded Members that it was agreed in December 2025 to go forward with the second part of the community governance review; this will go live on 24 February, and she asked Members to encourage their residents to support the

review. She said local government reorganisation will result in a single councillor representing as many 20k residents under the new unitary authority which will preclude inclusivity - only those who are retired or who can afford not to work will have the time to dedicate to the inevitable workload – and Liberal Democrats are keen to devolve power to the lowest common denominator in our parishes, to make sure that residents have a voice.

She said it is important to include parts of the town not currently represented by a parish council, saying that most councillors know from the doorstep that the Mayor plays an important civic role, and a town council for all the unparished areas of Cheltenham will maintain that and other important aspects of local government.

In response to Members' questions, she said:

- with reference to the parish elections scheduled for May, and whether the proposed minor boundary changes in Leckhampton with Warden Hill parish will require new elections or by-elections for additional vacancies once the new boundaries are settled, no new elections will be needed and the changes to the ward boundaries will apply from the next elections, although a specific order mandating an earlier election can form part of the consultation on parish boundaries;
- regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) benefits and payments going forward, 75% of all contributions goes towards strategic projects, with strict rules for the local neighbourhood infrastructure levy below that. A parish council receives 15% of the remainder, and a parish council or area with a neighbourhood plan will receive 25%. She said a town council would fall into that category.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- this update shows the importance of the community governance review, allowing individuals the opportunity to share their thoughts on the town's future. We currently have five parish councils in Cheltenham, but the centre and west of the town is unparished, and with potentially only two councillors per division in the new unitary council, we need to ensure those residents have a voice once the borough council is abolished. It is important that residents' opinions on this are heard;
- the review is welcomed, and the proposed changes to Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council, to include Pilley and parts of Charlton Park and Bournside are strongly commended;
- if we end up with a town council, it would be useful for understanding to have a clear distinction in the name of it and the outgoing borough council. As the town has a reputation as a Spa, Cheltenham Spa Town Council would work well, if acceptable;
- the borough council has always been very supportive of arts and cultural organisations in the town, providing discretionary funding to the Everyman, Playhouse, Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, and other organisations. In a unitary authority, spending many hundreds of thousands of pounds on adult and social care, arts funding will not be prioritised and will be delegated to town council level. It will not be fair, however, for a future town council to shoulder the entire

burden for the whole town, including the parishes, and not unreasonable if the parishes are asked to contribute to town-wide funding.

The Leader said she is very aware of this and it is part of the next phase of discussion, once residents and communities have told us what they want. It would not be fair for residents of a new town council to pay extra to look after parks, gardens and facilities which are enjoyed by all residents. This issue has been at the forefront from the start of the local government reorganisation process, but input from the elections team is needed for parish boundary reviews, and this work must currently take second place for them behind the upcoming local elections.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the revised Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review are agreed.**

Vote – unanimous

15 Notice of Motions

There were none.

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

There were none.