

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 17 March 2026

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.10 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Paul Baker, Mike Collins, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Izaac Tailford and Richard Pineger

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Tracey Birkinshaw (Director of Planning and Building Control) and Adele Taylor (Interim S151 Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Atherstone and Clucas.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February will be approved at the next meeting of Cabinet.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were none.

5 Homeseeker Policy Review

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, the Leader introduced the item, which proposes a number of key changes as set out in the report. She said these have been developed in collaboration with key

stakeholders, and will be put out to public consultation to ensure that all tenants and residents have a say in shaping the policy.

Members made the following comments:

- the Homeseeker approach is always supported and it is great how we work collaboratively on these issues within the confines of legislation and managing demand;
- it is frustrating that government was able to solve problems around housing and homelessness during the pandemic, and hard to believe that it couldn't be done again if government wanted;
- the process around housing allocations works well, though people can sometimes feel a sense of injustice. This review provides the opportunity for them to communicate their expectations and be involved in the consultation.

The Leader agreed that these comments show how right the council is to aspire to build more houses. She commented that there has been some criticism around the definition of affordable housing, especially for people with savings but no income. It is good to have policy and proper guidelines around this, in line with national guidance and best practice.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. this Authority is authorised to consult on the proposed changes to the Homeseeker Plus Allocations Policy; and**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Head of Strategic Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, to approve the new policy after the consultation period has ended, provided that there are no further material changes other than those that have already been identified within this report.**

6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Leader introduced her report, saying we all understand the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the new policy aims to ensure CBC is fair, welcoming and inclusive of everyone. She said the council interacts with thousands of people every year, and we want to reflect the town's diverse and changing population, with a clear and positive commitment to fairness, respect and equal access. The policy goes further than the minimum required, paying closer attention to how low income affects people's ability to use our services, and reinforces the expectation that everyone interacting with the council will be treated with dignity and respect.

She said the policy sets out clearer responsibilities for each service area, and has been informed by feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, not only to be compliant but also proactive and compassionate, and also to confirm that we are always ready to listen, learn and adapt. The clear framework is a foundation for the future, not the end of the journey.

A Member welcomed the policy, which highlights the importance of living with difference, and was pleased with the inclusion of the useful glossary of terms at the back.

In response to his suggestion that the policy could save public money, the Leader suggested that implementing the policy as laid out will potentially save people from needing to access further advice which would have a cost. She did not consider this to be a main policy objective, however.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy 2026, attached as Appendix 3 is approved.**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Director of Governance, Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Leader, to make any minor amendments to the policy as required following implementation.**

7 Housing Payments - Crisis and Resilience Fund Policy

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report, setting out a policy which offers financial support to residents in need through discretionary housing payments. This scheme has been in place for many years, but is now being replaced by a policy which is updated but will essentially work in the same way as the old one. The government will provide funding and CBC will be responsible for its administration for the next two years, after which time it will be fully integrated and administered by the new unitary authority.

The Leader welcomed the new policy, saying it is important to move with the times, which this is designed to do.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Housing Payments - Crisis and Resilience Fund Policy in Appendix 4 is approved;**
- 2. decisions relating to the award of Crisis and Resilience Fund Housing Payments, in line with the policy and DWP guidance, are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and designated officers within the Benefits team, with the final decision in the event of dispute being taken by the Section 151 Officer.**

3. the Section 151 Officer is authorised to apply to Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for an accounting direction if it appears that the annual allocation will be exceeded in any financial year.

8 Discretionary Business Rate Relief

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced his report, which recommends that CBC's Discretionary Business Rates Relief policy is updated to include three new government-funded temporary reliefs from April. He said that so far, 700 small businesses will benefit from the Supporting Small Businesses Relief, 71 pubs and venues across the town will benefit from a one-year reduction in their rates, and there will be a new relief for scheme for Electric Vehicle Charging Points and EV-only Forecourts.

He put on record his thanks to the Revenues and Benefits team for all their hard work behind the scenes to support the town's businesses.

In response to a Member's question, he said some businesses know their entitlement and approach the council, and officers work hard and do their best to make sure others know if they are eligible to apply. This issue has had a lot of national publicity, but he will check with the team as to whether additional communications and work with the Chamber of Commerce and BID are needed to ensure the whole of the business sector in Cheltenham is aware.

Members made the following comments:

- other than exorbitant rents, business rates are the most damaging thing for small businesses trying to survive in the current economic climate. This relief is welcome, but the government hasn't gone far enough and could do more. We need to help our pubs survive, and to consider anomalies such as the exemption from empty business rates for listed buildings – this discourages landlords from investing for new business to take on their properties, which is terrible for the High Street. It would be helpful if local councils could set rates locally, adjusting them based on particular streets or the types of business needed in an area, to support a thriving economy;
- these are narrow and very specific slices of relief, and there are many other businesses and organisations which would benefit from similar help – including not-for-profit businesses such as community centres;
- it is frustrating that the council cannot do more to help businesses, but a huge relief that BID is playing its part by raising the threshold of the cap on small businesses to a much higher amount, allowing a significant number to be exempt from contributing to the Business Improvement District;
- the government has gone so far but not all the way, which impacts on many organisations in a negative way. One example is the blanket idea that all football clubs have a bar and are therefore liable for commercial business rates; many do not, resulting in a lot of pressure on voluntary groups having to fight a half-baked piece of government legislation.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the amended Discretionary Business Rate Relief Policy in Appendix 3 is approved, to include the temporary reliefs referred to in this report from April 2026**
- 2. the Head of Revenues and Benefits is authorised in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets to implement any changes to the temporary relief schemes detailed in appendix 3, as required by Government guidance, or to ensure the successful operation of the schemes.**
- 3. due to the volume of cases, award decisions on temporary reliefs detailed in appendix 3 are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and officers in the Business Rates team. In the case of a dispute reconsideration is to be made by the Section 151 Officer.**

9 Biodiversity Report

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control began his introduction by thanking the officer team who put the report together. He said adopting the biodiversity report for 2026-31 will fulfil and strengthen CBC's statutory biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021, setting out the borough's key habitats, species, designated sites and green infrastructure. It also summarises the actions undertaken across planning, land management and community programmes, as well as outlining progress to date. In addition, it gives us a clear ecological baseline and sets our future priorities contained in the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as well as the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan (SLP). The report will be reviewed towards the end of the period, with any requirements or legislation included in an updated report to be published in 2031.

Members welcomed the excellent report, which is an endorsement of the council, its staff, Cabinet Members and local groups. They made the following comments:

- it is good to have the opportunity to review the delivery of the policy every five years;
- our many 'friends' groups do excellent work across the town, including on railway cuttings and nature reserves. As an urban centre, Cheltenham can be proud of how much it does to support and deliver biodiversity, through its tree strategy, planning, and commitment to biodiversity net gain;
- each paragraph of the report has so much behind it, with work dating back to 2006, and the council is in a good place to carry out future actions;
- the table at the end of the report, detailing actions and progress over the last 20 years, shows how committed CBC is to the environment and biodiversity. It is part of the Corporate Plan, and we do so many incredible things, including wildflower planting and bee corridors, to promote biodiversity in an urban area. Officers, volunteers and the council are to be commended;
- it would be worth adding the new Cheltenham Tree Strategy to the report.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control welcomed these positive comments, and agreed that there is a lot going on in and around Cheltenham to

support biodiversity. We will continue to work with our partners, and hope that this work will be carried forward by the new unitary authority.

The Leader agreed, saying our job is to continue delivering for our residents and to leave the town in the best possible way we can when the unitary authority takes over.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. that the biodiversity report (2026- 2031) is adopted;**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Director of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, to make any necessary minor amendments, corrections and additions to the document prior to publication.**

10 Notification of decisions made by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Joint Committee

The Leader brought this item to Cabinet to note, for transparency and openness, the grant decisions made by the CIL Joint Committee and agreed by the leaders of Gloucester City Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and CBC.

The CIL Joint Committee met earlier this year to allocate a new round of funding for infrastructure and services that matter most, and this includes support for critical development around the M5 and Junction 10 which is so important for the Golden Valley development but struggling to get across the line; all three councils and the county are behind this. She said the grants will help us to unlock homes, jobs, and sustainable transport for the future, and contribute to enabling works that must be completed before construction can start. It will benefit residents and support wider ambitions in the Golden Valley.

She also welcomed the 25% of CIL contributions ring-fenced for local organisations which meet the required criteria to invest in improving neighbourhood infrastructure and connecting communities. These grants represent real opportunities, delivered by committed partners, and all decisions will be monitored and fed back through the councils to ensure that all the money is having best possible impact.

Members were asked to note the decisions made by the CIL Joint Committee.

11 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency shared the following items:

- work continues to embed strong climate policy in the Strategic and Local Plan, alongside progress on town centre heat network, following the acceptance of £100k from the Department of Energy, Sustainability and Net Zero to fund the next stage of developments. He is hoping to coordinate delivery of that with geothermal companies, although they remain private at present;
- we are introducing the DATE (Donut Advisory Tool for Events) sustainability tour, for all events on council land. This free-to-use, simple tool kit helps local

- authorities to assess an event's community, accessibility, and environmental sustainability impacts, and we are planning to extend it to market operators;
- with other local authorities, he has co-signed a national call for a government rethink of the inclusion of a proposed limit on local energy efficiency standards for planning in the next National Planning Policy Framework. This would prevent local authorities from having higher energy efficiency standards;
 - the Transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan has been published, providing an early insight into future grid capacity needs in the southwest. This ties in with the heat network and geothermal work – if this can be used to produce heating, it will reduce the demand on the grid;
 - an independent decarbonisation survey has started at the leisure centre; the results will be shared soon;
 - local engagement work has continued with a Net Zero conference at the MX, and an outdoor heat pump demonstration at Lidl car park;
 - £14k has been secured from Climate Leadership Gloucestershire for a local accreditation scheme to help SMEs reduce their carbon emissions;
 - housing retrofit continues - 115 properties have been upgraded to EPC C-rating or above, with positive tenant feedback, and assessments have begun on the Warm Homes Social Housing Fund Wave 3 to install with heat pumps;
 - early work has begun on a CBC-wide e-learning module, possibly including an internal carbon dashboard, to provide everyone with a good idea about what the climate emergency means and what we're doing about it.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Realm began by reflecting on his new appreciation of Cheltenham's wonderful parks and independent coffee shops, and shared the following updates:

- he met with Cheltenham Festivals last week and the Cheltenham Trust this week to discuss some exciting developments, their plans for the future, and how we can work better together for the town and its future;
- the community-run Tourist Information Centre, formerly operating out of Cavendish House, has a new home in the Town Hall – good news for residents and visitors;
- he has had a good meeting with Fran Inman of the BID to discuss upcoming projects in the town centre, and work being done to support local businesses and the local economy. Many residents raise concerns about shop vacancies, particularly where there are a few side by side – although this is a nationwide problem and due to many issues including high rents and rates, Cheltenham is not faring too badly, and residents can be reassured that there are new businesses lined up to take on most of the empty premises in the town centre;
- tomorrow he is going on a tour of the Everyman Education Centre in Grove Street – an update will be provided at the next meeting – and attending the Cheltenham Arts Council awards.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space said that unlike some Cabinet colleagues, his portfolio gives him great opportunities to get out and meet people. He highlighted the following:

- with budget provision and a brilliant new allotments officer, the waiting list of 800 has been reduced to 500, through a combination of creating new plots and making sure that any unwanted plots are re-released quickly. Having visited the Midwinter allotments today, he was struck as always by the friendliness of everyone and the sociability that allotments bring;
- the ongoing situation with the long-established badger sett at the crematorium is difficult and sensitive, with previous attempts to relocate them to a new sett both disruptive and expensive with no guarantees of success. We are now working with the Gloucestershire Badger Group and ecologist, looking to repair the worst area of damage and installing a sunken fence which will control some of the badgers' movement but allow them to stay where they are. Together with clear signage, it is hoped that this may well be a way to resolve the situation;
- we are ready to start recycling tetra packs across the town from 01 April, and gearing up to roll out collection of flexible plastics ward by ward, starting in June.

The Leader said the Strategic and Local Plan Partnership is due to go out to Regulation 18 consultation soon, which is exciting but scary. Without a local development plan, councils cannot stop developers from building where they want, and although housebuilding is a top priority for this council, local areas must be able to decide where to build, how much is sustainable, and the quality and design of the homes that are built. CBC was very close to meeting its five-year housing supply but increased government numbers have set this back and we are being told we need to build more.

She had also welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Chair of the Cheltenham Trust and re-set that partnership. The Trust does so much for the town and this needs to be highlighted.

12 Cabinet Member Decisions taken since the last meeting

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

Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space:

- [To award a contract extension to Plan B for a period of two years from 01 March 2026](#)
- [To award a contract to James A Cuthbertson Ltd](#)

Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control:

- [To endorse the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) and confirm its use in planning policy, development management and biodiversity initiatives in Cheltenham](#)
- [To approve the council's submission of the combined Gloucestershire Local Planning Authorities' response and the Strategic and Local Plan authorities' response to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework consultation](#)

Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets:

- [Sale of the plot of land known as 45 Springbank Way](#)

13 Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 6.00pm on 14 April.