

# Cheltenham Borough Council

## Cabinet

## Minutes

**Meeting date:** 26 May 2026

**Meeting time:** 6.00 pm - 7.06 pm

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**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

Paul Baker, Flo Clucas, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Izaak Tailford, Richard Pineger, Steve Harvey and Jamie Jamieson

**Also in attendance:**

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Paul Minnis (Director of Major Development and Regeneration) and Adele Taylor (Interim Director of Finance and Operations (S151 Officer))

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### **1 Apologies**

There were none.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank two Members retiring from Cabinet: Councillor Atherstone who has now joined Gloucestershire County Council following the May election, and Councillor Collins who is now Deputy Mayor.

She welcomed two new Cabinet Members: Councillors Harvey and Jamieson, responsible for Waste, Recycling and Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space, and Safety and Communities respectively.

### **2 Declarations of interest**

There were none.

### **3 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14 April were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

### **4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions**

Three public questions had been received, with written responses published on the website:

#### **1. Question from Peter Frings to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

Due diligence regarding Horizon Aero Group and the attempted sale of the airport. The auditors of the most recent accounts of Gloucestershire Airport, in their notes to the accounts, highlighted that no formal letter of financial support was ever received from Horizon Aero Group. Neither of the two Horizon Aero Group Directors – who made the vague representations which the Airport directors relied on – have any other directorships in the UK. There is one other director of Horizon Aero Group who is a director of two micro companies valued at £8k and £5k (one of which is Vayu Aviation Services.). Horizon Aero Group is a shell created only in Jan 2025. It has no filing history. Its confirmation statement is overdue. No Identity verification of the 3 directors has been filed at Companies House. It has share capital of £100. The backing company was obviously Vensa Infrastructure in India, which seems a more substantial company... but it is a construction company in India. So my question is: as owners of the Airport, did Cheltenham Borough Council discover all these facts for itself, yet still go ahead and attempt a sale to a hastily established shell consortium with no substantive business experience, no experience of running an airport, and which was unable to demonstrate that it had the funding to complete the sale? Or did the council simply not do any due diligence at all?

#### **Cabinet Member response**

As often with the nature of such transactions, it is not unusual for investors to set up a special purpose vehicle, or SPV. As part of the due diligence process, it was agreed that Horizon Group's people, investors and the team behind them had significant experience across many fields within the aviation industry, which combined with the skills and experience that will come with Gloucestershire Airport Limited, was one of the key considerations behind the selection of Horizon.

Therefore based on the facts at the time, we were satisfied.

The fact that investors changed their mind as the due diligence process was undertaken is a standard risk of any transaction, as is with someone buying a house. There are never any guarantees.

## **2. Question from Peter Frings to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

The most recent accounts for Gloucestershire Airport have an impairment charge of £6.7m, which contributed to a loss for the year of £7.6m, which is on top of a loss of £1.6m the previous year. Can the Leader of the Council explain how this impairment charge appeared out of nowhere? Could it be that with a sale coming up, there would obviously be independent valuations of assets which would expose all the over-valuations in previous years which had been used to mask losses, hence the need to reverse the previous over-valuations? Could the Leader of the Council also offer an explanation to residents of how a public asset which was stated as having a balance sheet value of £26.6m in March 2021 is now only worth £11.9m in March 2025?

### **Cabinet Member response**

The impairment charge referred to is related to the previous book value of the company and the financial terms agreed, it is an accounting function only, not an actual cost.

Valuation for accounting purposes commonly does not reflect the market value and this is an important difference to recognise. Given this is purely an accounting function, independent market valuations have been undertaken on the site ahead of sale and these are reflective of a much higher value than the book value.

Due to a clerical error the full text of question 3 was not published correctly. The Leader read out the missing section for the public record. The answer will be reviewed and if additional information is required this will be provided in writing.

## **3. Question from Miriam Frings to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

Leaded aviation fuel is potentially a significant health risk for children living under a flight path. A summary of recent research is given in the paper "Lead exposure from general aviation emissions in the UK: A review and call for action" by Ashley Mills and Stephen Peckham, published in Public Health Challenges in 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/puh2.27>. Leaded aviation fuel is mainly used by light propeller aircraft. Gloucestershire Airport has one of the highest number of light aircraft movements in the UK. Cheltenham has one of the largest concentrations of residences close to the downwind area of an airport. Could the Cabinet Member find out: what volumes of leaded aviation fuel have been used at Gloucestershire Airport in each of the last 3 years? If leaded aviation fuel is used in aircraft flying into and out of Gloucestershire Airport, will the Council commit to organising sampling of

children living in the west of Cheltenham underneath the flight path, to assess whether they have level of lead in their blood higher than the national average? If the Council believes that this does not fall within its own public health remit, will the Council identify the relevant body that does have responsibility for assessing this health risk, and formally request that they carry out an assessment?

### **Cabinet Member response**

Thank you Ms Frings for her question.

This does not fall within this council's public health remit. The county council, in whose remit this will fall, has provided the following response:

*Gloucestershire County Council's Public Health function does not commission or routinely undertake population-wide blood lead screening. This reflects national policy that screening of children without clinical indication is not routinely recommended in the UK. Instead, surveillance relies on laboratory testing and targeted investigation where elevated levels are identified. Responsibility for surveillance, specialist risk assessment, and incident response relating to lead exposure lies primarily with the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA), working alongside health system partners and local authority Environmental Health teams.*

*In England, there is the Lead Exposure in Children Surveillance System (LEICSS Lead Exposure in Children Surveillance System (LEICSS) annual report, 2025 - GOV.UK) coordinated by the UKHSA. LEICSS is a passive national surveillance system, whereby laboratories automatically notify UKHSA of children (aged 0–15) with elevated blood lead concentrations. Public health action is triggered when a child is found (through routine clinical testing) to have a blood lead level above the intervention threshold, rather than through population screening programmes.*

If you would like to follow this up, please contact Gloucestershire County Council Public Health department. If required, I can ask officers to provide you with the correct contact information.

None of the questioners were present to ask supplementary questions.

## **5 Leasehold Ownership Policy**

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services introduced the policy, explaining that it had been reviewed by the Leaseholder Forum and the Cabinet Housing Committee, and recommended to Cabinet for approval with no significant amendments.

The Leader welcomed the consultation with leaseholders and noted that they are happy with the suggested moves which will improve their input. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services agreed that the Leaseholder Forum is important to ensure that leaseholders have been able to share their thoughts, and was pleased that this will provide them with assurance that their voice is being heard and improvements are being made.

**RESOLVED THAT:**

- **the Leasehold Ownership Policy be approved.**

**6 Award of rent support grant to voluntary sector organisation - Whaddon United Football Club**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets highlighted the council's wider ambitions for the thriving and voluntary community sector, many of whom utilise buildings owned by the council. How the council can continue to support these groups within its own commercial journey can provide a challenge; rent support grants were introduced in 2016, allowing community organisations to receive a percentage discount of the commercial rent by demonstrating how their organisation, through the use of the building, contributes to the council's agreed corporate priorities. This is appropriate as the council needs to modernise and take Cheltenham's communities on the journey in a supportive way. The Cabinet Member said that the report sets out the policy and this particular application, and highlighted with pleasure that once again the council has been able to support a community organisation.

A Member asked, now that ten years have passed, whether a review of the policy was planned. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets noted that he would need to check whether there has been a full review but agreed that this is worth considering. He suggested this review would probably sit with other Cabinet colleagues. The Leader noted that the council is very proud of the policy but agreed that the form applicants are required to fill in could be updated and improved.

The Cabinet Member noted that it would be interesting to ask the finance team and property team to provide a report on how much revenue the council has foregone in support of communities over the past ten years.

Members made the following comments:

- a review of the policy and form by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm would be a positive step, to ensure that both are more applicable to sporting clubs;
- this rent support grant will have a small impact on the council but a huge impact on the club; obviously, collectively, the grants add up to a much bigger pot for the council but each one makes a difference;
- the decision is welcomed as the council must do all it can to support the voluntary sector and local sports clubs who contribute so much to the town;

- as the ward member, this is a favourite project, partly because it is part of the legacy of the late Paul Jones who helped to make it happen, and partly because it is turning a building previously used as a resource centre by Cheltenham Borough Homes back to community use. Nobody knew quite what to do with these buildings right in the heart of their communities, and this is one of the best solutions so far - the club's first ever proper community clubhouse. It is excellent that the council is providing financial support and can hopefully do more in the future.
- Whaddon United has existed for over 70 years, has adult and youth teams but has never had a clubhouse. It is always busy and is already asking for more space, six months after taking it on;
- it is great that there are two significant football clubs in Whaddon; sporting clubs are often unrecognised for their huge contribution to their communities. They teach young people football skills and much more, playing a huge part in the council's offer. Anything the council can do to support these groups is to be commended.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

- 1. the following rent support grant be approved:**
  - **Applicant: Oakley Community Resource Centre**
  - **Recommended rent support grant: A rent support grant of 56% of current market rent.**
  
- 2. authority be delegated to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader, in consultation with One Legal to agree the terms of a rent support grant agreement with the applicant.**

## **7 Briefing from Cabinet Members**

Cabinet Members briefed their colleagues on recent events as follows:

Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets:

- housing benefit changed some time ago to universal credit but has taken a long time to be fully implemented; the council has received a letter thanking all local authorities for their support in that process, actually making government ideas happen. He said it has not always been a smooth process for some customers and residents but the transition is now slowly coming to an end.

Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services:

- recently attended a meeting of the Cheltenham Street Pastors, with people from all over the country, the president, Gloucestershire's Deputy Commissioner of Police, and the senior cleric from Tewkesbury Abbey. It was a great occasion where people were able to speak about what was important, and she was able to highlight Cheltenham's work through No Child Left Behind, and what is being done in the night-time economy to make the town

safer for women and young people. She had also had the opportunity to introduce the president of the Cheltenham Street Pastors to ITSA (IT Schools Africa) to build potential connections.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control:

- the Strategic Local Plan is the main focus at present, and he has been impressed by the quality of work so far, the research and officer engagement, and how the three authorities are working together. Any concern that any of the individual authorities may lose some of their influence has not happened.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency reported on a month of steady, practical progress on climate and resilience across Cheltenham, including:

- the opening of the greenhouse in St. Paul's, which is a permanent community hub for climate action, helping residents and businesses take practical steps locally;
- Cheltenham Zero continuing to deliver funded projects supporting local businesses to reduce energy use and emissions;
- the heat network project now formally underway, with governance established and feasibility work progressing, which will position Cheltenham to attract national investment;
- over 100 council homes upgraded to EPC C or better, which cuts carbon and improves living conditions. Further phases are coming forward.
- flood resilience strengthened with new protections installed and community flood wardens reaching thousands of households.
- an acceleration of public engagement, with Cheltenham is hosting the internationally-renowned Everything Electric show from the 12–14 June at the race course. There will be EV test drives on offer, plus solar panels, heat pumps and opportunities to ask questions;
- the upward trend in extreme weather events, demonstrated by the recent heatwave, is indicative of climate change, and some immediate measures have been put in place, such as waste collection starting an hour earlier. Going forward, Cheltenham will continue to prepare for the future with urban tree planting and other heat resilience measures;
- a long-term flood risk report to cover the period up to 2040 is also being prepared, and we are building awareness through initiatives like the national emergency briefing which should be delivered to all staff at some point.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm thanked Cheltenham Playhouse for inviting him, the Leader and the Mayor to the opening of the Cheltenham Fringe Festival, a great event filled with talent across a range of different artistic pursuits. This inclusive and wide-reaching festival reaffirms the support the council gave to the Playhouse last year, financially and with a long-term lease, to secure this great asset for the future.

He said that during the election, he spoke to many residents and businesses concerned about the town centre and high street, and while they understand that a lot of the biggest issues are truly out of local council control, he said the council is

doing what it can to support and strengthen the town centre. We need to be honest about the challenges which have hit both the retail and hospitality sector hard – increased business rates and global events which have driven increases rents, wages, energy and goods – but said it is more important than ever that the council is clear about what can be done and what is being done to support the high street:

- Cheltenham is still performing strongly - overall vacancy rates at 7.8% compared to the national average, which can be as high as 17% - but some streets are facing higher vacancy rates and a few empty units in a prominent location look bad, and large empty buildings such as Cavendish House and the former Oasis shop on the High Street have a disproportionate impact due to their visibility. . The council is already taking a firmer approach on these matters, by working to hold Canada Life to account over Cavendish House, and he was pleased to say the Oasis store is now being renovated and will imminently be let to new tenants;
- the installation of artwork on Cavendish House by Paint Festival director Andy Dice Davies is very welcome; it will deter tagging, keep the building protected and it improve the look of the Promenade;
- the council is currently awaiting the next update from Canada Life about their future plans but the council has provided positive feedback on their most recent pre-planning application. The council responds as quickly as possible to avoid holding up any processes because Cavendish House is such a vital part of the town centre.
- the council continues to challenge property owners who leave their units empty for long periods without good reason. To support this, clear guidance will be produced setting out the powers available to local authorities under current legislation and how they can be used to enable consistent and transparent action to be taken where it is needed to ensure the town centre is properly populated with shops and cafes;
- he and officers have also been actively listening to business, both through the BID and directly, and continue to work collaboratively to encourage footfall in the town centre, increase dwell time and strengthen Cheltenham's offer. This includes working closely with partners and the county council to improve the public realm cleanliness and overall experience of being in the town centre to encourage repeat visits, promote investment and encourage new shops to come to the town. It also means taking a less disjointed approach, making sure things are properly protected so they require less replacement, and other mitigation techniques;
- a new town centre public realm approach, created through public realm meetings with the BID, will be released at the start of June alongside a public survey to ask residents, visitors and businesses for their thoughts and their priorities for the town centre.
- we also continue to work with Max Wilkinson MP to campaign nationally to support local businesses. and maintain a vibrant town centre, which remains a top priority for the council in the face of ongoing and upcoming national challenges far outside even the government's control. We have to do as much as possible to support our town centre and will continue to listen and work in partnership and take action to protect and strengthen Cheltenham's high

street, and its amazing businesses and cultural sector.

The Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling and Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space said he delighted to join the Cabinet and has been going through his briefs with senior officers – he thanked them for their patient and professional approach.

He also welcomed the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities meeting with the Cheltenham Street Pastors, having seen as Mayor how they contribute to Cheltenham's night-time economy and safety, along with the Cheltenham Guardians.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery noted that there is some very exciting exempt news that she hopes to be able to share shortly.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities said he is new to Cabinet and still learning his role, but shared the following:

- Cheltenham has been awarded purple flag accreditation for the 11<sup>th</sup> year running, an award granted by the Association of Town and City Management and capturing a whole raft of factors that make a town centre a safe and thoroughly enjoyable place. They evaluate clear evidence about the place's safety, diversity, vibrancy, accessibility, cleanliness and how it works with partner organisations around the town, and the award reassures everyone that they can come to Cheltenham and have a nice, safe night out. This is particularly important for Cheltenham as the festival town, a crucial underpinning to its reputation, and something of which we can be proud.

The Leader welcomed the new members of the Cabinet and congratulated the Cabinet Members who were re-elected or elected.

She took the opportunity to respond to discussion on social media around the MX, given her involvement from Day One and the council's determination to keep this really important project on track as a taster for the eventual Golden Valley purchase. She highlighted:

- the project was completed in July 2024 and, now entering the third year of operation, it has demonstrated strong financial and operational performance which align with the original objective to create co-working space for businesses within Cheltenham. This includes attracting businesses that align with Golden Valley, and may wish to occupy that space in the future;
- it has also provided an opportunity to regenerate the area around the Minster gardens, which was very derelict;
- the financial forecast for 2026-27 is to deliver a revenue income of £848k, representing a 27.6% net margin. This is positive, having grown steadily from 24-25 when it achieved 20%;
- the operation has already repaid £213k of the £340k in the tier 2 contingency funding which the Council approved in June 2023. Full repayment of this contingency is on track for December 2026 in line with the original schedule, and longer-term forecasts indicate that the full council investment will be

repaid over a 25-year period in line with the original business case. This will need to be closely monitored and the MX team must carefully manage the mix between more permanent tenants who lease fixed spaces alongside managing the flow of hot-desking and flexible desks to ensure that the revenue remains strong;

- it also provides a fantastic event space, although that does need maximising as part of the overall model;
- the financial performance has been driven by strong occupancy levels and interest, particularly in private office space. The occupier mix reflects a broad and healthy ecosystem including established prime tenants, high growth SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), and early-stage start-ups. There is some significant company interest that will be evident in the future;
- the project is successfully delivering against its economy development objectives, supporting high-value sectors - notably cyber job creation and skills development - and creating more opportunities for local people. It is also providing inward investment and positioning itself as a key strategic asset within the Golden Valley development;
- the MX continues to play a key role in supporting business growth and innovation via the mentoring to start-ups. Its events programme is well established and growing, including the re-branded Connect series, positioning the MX as a central hub for the cyber and technology community. It has been an amazing journey to be part of and to see how much the MX has achieved;
- there are some risks and issues: the MX has been working with council teams and with the church to actively manage that impact of continuing anti-social behaviour in the area. It is important that people working in those spaces feel safe, especially as some with global partners have now extended their opening hours to reflect the different working hour;
- the café is not generating the level of income or business expected considering the location and access to members within the MX, which is disappointing, and is currently in a performance management period that needs to be closely managed. She has met with officers to look at the finances and noted that there has been a lot of turnaround.

She ended by saying that there is a long way to go but it is really promising that occupancy is at 100%, and the space is regularly reconfigured to ensure its most economical use. She said the point will come when there will be no more space to move things around.

## **8 Cabinet Member Decisions since the last meeting**

There were three decisions to share on this occasion:

**28 April:** Decision of Cabinet Member Housing and Customer Services – [CBC contribution to rough sleeping services across the county 2026-27](#)

**6 May:** Decision of the Leader – [Ubico – Shareholders Agreement and Amendment of Articles of Association](#)

**15 May:** Decision of the Leader – [Gloucestershire Airport Limited – Shareholder Decision](#)

## **9 Local Government Act 1972 - Exempt Business**

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

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

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

## **10 A Property Matter**

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report as circulated to Cabinet, and provided an opportunity for questions to be asked.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

- the recommendations in the report be approved.