

## **Council**

**Monday, 17th October, 2016**  
**2.35 - 7.30 pm**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Councillors:</b>	Chris Ryder (Chairman), Klara Sudbury (Vice-Chair), Matt Babbage, Paul Baker, Garth Barnes, Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter, Flo Clucas, Chris Coleman, Mike Collins, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Colin Hay, Rowena Hay, Sandra Holliday, Steve Jordan, Adam Lillywhite, Chris Mason, Helena McCloskey, Paul McCloskey, Andrew McKinlay, Dan Murch, Chris Nelson, Tony Oliver, Dennis Parsons, John Payne, Louis Savage, Diggory Seacome, Malcolm Stennett, Pat Thornton, Simon Wheeler, Roger Whyborn, Max Wilkinson and David Willingham

## **Minutes**

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Councillors Jeffries, Hobley, Walklett and Williams had given their apologies.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Rowena Hay declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 13 (Notices of Motion) as a Trustee of the Oakley Neighbourhood Project.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 18 July 2016 be approved and signed as an accurate record.**

### **4. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR**

The Mayor informed members that since the last Council meeting, she had been invited to over 90 events and meetings as Mayor and some of the highlights included:

- Celebrating 300 years of Spa waters in the town at Pittville Pump Rooms with a Tea, which proved a successful fundraiser for her two charities.
- Along with Councillor Chris Coleman, she had attended the South West of England and Wales Green Flag ceremony where five

Green Flags were awarded, including a Prestigious Heritage award for Pittville Park, which she commended as an outstanding result for Green Space Development, Park Department, UBICO and the many voluntary friends groups who worked in partnership with the Council.

- For receiving so many Green Flags and for the floral planting in the gardens and superb hanging baskets, the Council in collaboration with Cheltenham in Bloom, had awarded UBICO and the Green Space Development team, with the Business Pride Trophy.
- Cheltenham had been accredited with a Purple Flag, which celebrated town and cities that have a vibrant and safe town centre, whilst managing their night-time economy. This was great news and the awards presentation evening would take place in November at the Town Hall.
- Continuing celebrations of our 60 years twinned with Annecy, the Mayor along with over fifty Cheltenham residents had visited the town in August and a particular highlight of the trip had been the Fete De Lac firework displays. She gave thanks to the Twinning Committee for their work in organising the visit.
- She felt privileged to have unveiled the six names that had been added to the towns recently restored War memorial on the 76<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Battle of Britain.
- Along with Councillors Mr and Mrs Hay, the Mayor had the pleasure of being in the welcoming line-up to meet the Duchess of Gloucester when she paid a visit to Faithfull House and The Phoenix Centre.
- The Mayor and several other Members had attended Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Gloucestershire awards ceremony at Imjin Barracks. The awards celebrated the professional and personal achievements of those who worked or volunteered within the Reserve Forces and the cadet Movement. Cheltenham College and All Saints Academy had received top awards, as well as Cadet Poppy Slack.
- There had been a number of student visits to the Chamber from countries including Japan, China, Poland, France and Germany.

The Mayor acknowledged the passing of two retired Members of Cheltenham Borough Council: Alderman Robin MacDonald who was Mayor in 2008-2009 and Mary Gray. The Mayor, along with Mark Sheldon, the Director of Corporate Resources and Projects, had attended Alderman MacDonald's funeral.

The Mayor took the opportunity to thank the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sudbury, for attending several engagements on her behalf.

## **5. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Leader echoed the condolences of the Mayor, for Mary Gray and Alderman MacDonald and he was aware that a memorial service had been arranged for Mary Gray at Cheltenham Minister, St. Mary's. He endorsed the commendation of the Green and Purple flags that had been awarded, which was great news for the town.

The waste and recycling consultation had launched today, with residents being invited to choose their preferred option. This was in advance of a very important decision later in the year, on the collection of recyclables, ahead of procuring new vehicles next year.

It was announced that Councillor Baker would be replacing Councillor Collins on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

He advised that the report on the Domestic Homicide Review into the tragic case of Jane Wigget would be published tomorrow. Cheltenham Borough Council had co-ordinated the review, from which many lessons had already been learned, with more to follow. This tied in with the motion on coerced debt, which would be debated later in the meeting.

## 6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

Councillor Colin Hay submitted three petitions which called upon Cheltenham Borough Council to work with Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham Borough Homes, the NHS and the Police to ensure that services provided by the Oakley neighbourhood Project. Which had announced its closure, would be maintained and enhanced in the future. The petitions had 761 signatures collectively and the Mayor was happy to accept them as one petition.

## 7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1.	<b>Question from Mr Mike Evans to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	There is much talk at national level about the protection of children and young people. Would the Leader of Cheltenham Borough Council confirm that he and his fellow councillors are aware of such concern and are actively committed to ensuring that safeguards are in place in this borough to protect our children and grandchildren and explain where that focus lies?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Cheltenham Borough Council has two elected member champions for Safeguarding and a comprehensive safeguarding children and adults policy. The Champions work with officers and elected members to ensure that the Borough Council has safeguarding procedures within its own services but also that the Borough Council works with other agencies to support effective safeguarding across the Borough. This takes the form of working through multi agency groups as well as supporting partnership projects to support children at risk. The elected member champions are regularly in contact with the Chair of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Childrens Boards to ensure local accountability for safeguarding the Borough's children.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Mr Evans asked will the Leader of the Council agree with him, a resident of Pittville, that recent comments made by one of the members for Pittville, Councillor Parsons – no matter how much misrepresented or misinterpreted –</p>

	<p>regarding career officers suggesting prostitution as a potential career for our young people, run totally counter to the hard work that his administration and other, external bodies have put in to safeguarding and protecting young people in the Borough? Will the Leader now disassociate himself and his administration from these comments?</p> <p>The Leader responded 'no' to the question and said he had nothing further to add to his response.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Question from Mr Barry Perks to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>Does Cheltenham Borough Council have – or does it intend to seek – any powers to recall any Member who causes grave public concern, as has been the case with one of the Councillors for Pittville, as a result of his comments concerning sex work as a career choice for children leaving school?</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Firstly may I commiserate with Mr Perks on failing to win the Pittville seat when he stood against Cllr Parsons in May.</p> <p>Cllr Parsons is entirely clear on what he said and why and that this has been misinterpreted in the press.</p> <p>As Cllr Parsons has stated, "My remarks were initially misinterpreted by the national media; and subsequently misrepresented by my political opponents.</p> <p>I was commenting in a discussion on a consultation paper on sex work prepared by a national Liberal Democrat study group. That document is in the public realm and can be seen at <a href="http://tinyurl.com/hp9dzm3">http://tinyurl.com/hp9dzm3</a>. The paper listed 32 questions and the meeting was discussing them in blocks. My comments related to one single question - 'Do we have a duty to reduce stigma? Can we?'</p> <p>I was arguing that this could never happen because, to do so, it would be necessary to see sex work as no different from any other work - accountancy for example. And, taken to its logical conclusion, careers masters would suggest prostitution as an option for certain school leavers. I followed this by stating specifically 'It will never happen'. And of course it will never happen because it is unthinkable and no sane person would ever contemplate it. So there will always be stigma attaching to sex work.</p> <p>So, do I believe, as has been suggested, that careers masters should recommend sex work to school leavers? Of course not. To suggest such a thing is absolutely ridiculous."</p> <p>Cllr Parson is more than happy to discuss this with any Pittville resident who was concerned by the press coverage. While Mr Perks isn't a resident in Pittville I'm sure the same offer extends to him.</p> <p>I do not expect Cheltenham Borough Council is likely to seek powers mentioned by Mr Perks since elections provide the appropriate means of deciding who residents wish to represent them.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Mr Perks called upon the Leader to investigate with his legal advisers, and to implement as appropriate, disciplinary measures into this Council Chamber when it is perceived that a member has broken the published Code of Conduct, acts in a disrespectful way to the Mayor or other councillors or fails to</p>

	<p>follow convention laid down over time.</p> <p>The Leader responded that it was not his role to investigate such matters as this was the role of the Council's Standard Committee. He was not aware of any breach of the Members' Code of Conduct and he was not aware that there had been one in this case. He had given a full response to the question and when prompted by the Mayor he indicated that he would be happy for this or any questioner to make further contact with him outside the meeting regarding this matter.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Question from Mr Alan McDougall to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>As a concerned resident of Pittville I am extremely unhappy that I and my fellow residents are represented at Council by an individual who made such an appalling statement regarding the choice of sex work as a career option for children, as widely reported in the media, at the Liberal Democrat Conference. Would the Leader of the Council explain what steps he is taking to deal with this serious matter?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>I refer Mr McDougall to my answer to Qu 2.</p> <p>My aim would be to provide an environment where sensitive issues can be discussed without the risk of hysterical over reaction in the press. This would increase the chance of finding practical solutions to difficult issues. However, this would involve sections of the national press acting in a more responsible way than they currently do. Equally as a believer in a free press this is not something I would seek to impose but will always support providing such an environment locally.</p> <p>Mr McDougall thanked the Leader for his response and trusted that he would respond to letters he had received from residents of Pittville, as yet unanswered, and, significantly, on comments made by community leaders, such as the Bishop of Gloucester and by parents on Mumsnet, regarding the subject of prostitution as a careers option. He asked whether the Leader was prepared to support those concerns today and to use his communications skills to reach out to concerned and angry citizens?</p> <p>The Leader said that he could not guarantee to respond to every comment on social media and he was not in a position to respond to the hysterical comments in the media about this matter. He would be happy to participate in a sensible debate but the mass hysteria being raised on this issue was not helpful to that debate.</p>

## 8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

<b>1.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman</b>
	<p>Dr Dick Nickalls, on behalf of the Cheltenham Civic Society, has been trying to secure a meeting with the Cabinet Member since April this year to discuss some ideas in relation to the Public Realm and Street Cleaning. The Cheltenham Civic Society has become frustrated by the lack of response and has asked me to table this question today.</p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member now agree to set up an early meeting and explain his silence on this matter?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>I am surprised that Cllr Harman has chosen to ask a Member Question in respect of this matter. He already knows my answer given that we previously discussed it in the</p>

Members Room at the Municipal Offices some months ago.

As Cllr Harman will recall, I have spoken to Dr Nickalls and discussed his view on street cleaning in Parabola Road. He did indeed indicate that he was speaking on behalf of the Cheltenham Civic Society in expressing his views but I formed the view that the CCS would not simply want to speak about one road. I had always understood that they were interested in the whole of the town. As a result, I dealt with his representations as I try to do with all of those residents I speak to and raised it with Officers.

Cllr Harman may also be aware that an Officer met with Dr Nickalls and discussed the issues around Parabola Road. As a result, the road received a deep clean and leaf litter was removed. This involved the coning of areas to prevent cars parking and the digging out of drains which were set back from the road. Dr Nickall was given the contact details of the relevant Officers in case he wished to discuss the matter further but, as I understand it, he has not been in contact further. Accordingly, we are a little perplexed by the matter being raised as a Member Question at Council.

I have conducted my own research and I can find no trace of Dr Nickalls being an Officer of the Cheltenham Civic Society. I have read one set of minutes of a CCS meeting when he gave a presentation which suggested he was concerned about the state of the roads and pavements in the town. I wholeheartedly agree with him on that point although would suggest he ask Cllr Harman to raise the matter at the County Council where is party is responsible for such matters. I have read a further set of minutes where Dr Nickalls was given advice to contact his ward Councillor if he had any issues relevant to this Council.

I have not to my knowledge ever received correspondence from the CCS requesting a meeting to discuss matters relevant to my portfolio. Aside from receiving their briefings and representations on Planning matters, I believe I have only ever received correspondence in relation to my assisting them as a Judge for the Civic Awards.

As all Members will know, I have met with a variety of representative organisations in own town in relation to matters relevant to my portfolio, including the Friends of Pittville, local funeral directors and Cheltenham Town FC. I have always been, and remain, very happy to have such meetings to answer questions, hear representations and discuss how we can together continue to improve our town.

All Members should also know that since joining the Cabinet I have tried to assist colleagues with matters of casework relevant to my portfolio. Indeed, Cllr Harman will recall our discussions and site meeting around refuse collections in Casino Place.

If any local organisation wishes to meet with me and/or the Officers I work with in my portfolio I will gladly make that happen. All I ask is that an Officer of the organisation takes the time to get in touch. For the avoidance of doubt, that offer is very much open to the Cheltenham Civic Society.

I would also be keen to take this opportunity to say to residents in our town that if they have any issue which they think the Council can help with then they should contact their local ward Councillors. If in due course colleagues need my help to assist their residents, I will continue to be very pleased to do what I can to help.

	<p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Harman asked whether the Cabinet Member would therefore agree to meet with Dr Nickalls as requested.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member responded that it was important to make the distinction between a concerned local resident and a person representing an outside body. He had not received any correspondence from a representative of the Civic Society and if he did he would be happy to set up a meeting with them. With regard to Dr Nickalls, he and council officers considered they had dealt properly with the issues he had raised and had responded appropriately.</p> <p>The Mayor requested that the Cabinet Member and Councillor Harman get together outside the meeting to resolve the matter.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Louis Savage to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	<p>Gloucester City Council has recently taken significant steps to modernise and simplify parking in its King's Walk and Eastgate car parks. Contactless debit card payment will allow shoppers to pay on exiting Council car parks, without having to worry about overstaying or the need for cash. Can the Cabinet Member confirm if there are plans for any such improvements to Cheltenham's council-operated car parks?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Councillor Savage is hopefully aware that the Council is currently reviewing its long term parking strategy, with the process being overseen by a cross-party member working group. The agreed objectives of the review are:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To ensure the provision of adequate car parking that is delivered effectively, logically and at a competitive cost, whilst encouraging access by more sustainable transport alternatives, including walking, cycling and public transport;</li> <li>2. To help manage traffic, minimise congestion and its associated environmental impacts;</li> <li>3. To enhance the visitor experience and thereby help to optimise the economy of the town.</li> </ol> <p>The Council will consider the option of contactless payments in relation to future purchases of parking payment equipment.</p> <p>Customers worried about the risk of overstaying, or the need to carry cash, already have parking options in the town, including Regent Arcade and Royal Well which accept credit/debit card payments and other car parks which have the facility to pay by phone. Paying by phone gives the added value of text alerts and the option of extending stay periods, which overcomes the issues referred to.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Savage suggested that there was a perception that the council was lagging behind in its use of technology and would the Cabinet Member look at the introduction of contactless payment at car park exits to make it easier and simpler for shoppers and visitors to the town when using the car parks?</p>

	<p>The Cabinet Member agreed that the aim of the car parking review was to make car parking easier and as efficient as possible for all visitors to the town. However he would want to take soundings from the all-party Cabinet Members car parking working group before making any changes as they had been set up to look at all the issues.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>Given the public concern that has been expressed, will the Leader of the Council state whether he still has full confidence in his colleague Councillor Parsons following his controversial remarks at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Cllr Parsons has been elected by the people of Pittville so I'm not sure why would he need a vote of confidence from me.</p> <p>Since I wasn't present at the debate referred to I can't comment on who said what. However, Cllr Parson is entirely clear on what he said and why and that this has been misinterpreted in the press.</p> <p>As Cllr Parsons has stated, "My remarks were initially misinterpreted by the national media; and subsequently misrepresented by my political opponents.</p> <p>I was commenting in a discussion on a consultation paper on sex work prepared by a national Liberal Democrat study group. That document is in the public realm and can be seen at <a href="http://tinyurl.com/hp9dzm3">http://tinyurl.com/hp9dzm3</a>. The paper listed 32 questions and the meeting was discussing them in blocks. My comments related to one single question - 'Do we have a duty to reduce stigma? Can we?'</p> <p>I was arguing that this could never happen because, to do so, it would be necessary to see sex work as no different from any other work - accountancy for example. And, taken to its logical conclusion, careers masters would suggest prostitution as an option for certain school leavers. I followed this by stating specifically 'It will never happen'. And of course it will never happen because it is unthinkable and no sane person would ever contemplate it. So there will always be stigma attaching to sex work.</p> <p>So, do I believe, as has been suggested, that careers masters should recommend sex work to school leavers? Of course not. To suggest such a thing is absolutely ridiculous."</p> <p>Cllr Parson is more than happy to discuss it with any Pittville resident who was concerned by the press coverage.</p> <p>On a wider point finding practical solutions to difficult problems does require the ability for an honest debate of the issues involved. I have an on-going concern about how you can ever achieve this when attempts to do so produce such an overreaction.</p> <p>In a supplementary question. Councillor Harman did not feel the Leader had answered his original question and so requested a response. Could the Leader also explain why Councillor Parsons had been asked by Martin Horwood to resign as chairman of the Cheltenham Liberal Democrats but no action had been taken by the Liberal Democrat group at this council regarding the Member for the Pittville ward?</p>



	<p>The Leader replied that yes he did have confidence in Councillor Parsons, however that was irrelevant as Councillor Parsons had been elected by his residents. He was not prepared to give any further explanation.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b></p> <p>As elected representatives we have a responsibility for Safeguarding our young people. County Councillors are encouraged to become Corporate Parents. Following the remarks made by a member of this Council at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference will the Leader agree to arrange a seminar for all Members on Safeguarding to remind of us of the dangers that exist for young people today?</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>I refer Cllr Harman to my answer to Qu 3 if he is interested in the facts around the debate at Liberal Democrat Conference.</p> <p>On the issue of Safeguarding, training is provided as part of the member induction programme. Training on a wide range of safeguarding topics is also available via e-learning at the Council. The Borough Council regularly facilitates seminars and guest speakers on safeguarding topics this has included over the past two years talks from the Police, Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Social Services, Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, Social services and local VCS organisations around safeguarding. There are also a number of seminar opportunities hosted by other partners including the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Board and Cheltenham and Tewkesbury domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Forum.</p> <p>Councillor Harman had no supplementary question but hoped that members of the Council would attend future safeguarding events in large numbers.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles, Councillor Flo Clucas</b></p> <p>Prostitution is not about real choice and many women, men and children are forced into this activity because of abuse, exploitation, violence, drugs and money problems. Does the Cabinet Member for Healthy Lifestyles agree with the Bishop of Gloucester's comments that "Dennis Parsons shockingly failed to understand power differential &amp; meaning of 'choice'?"</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>My views on Prostitution are well known; as are my views on Freedom of Speech.</p> <p>The causes of Prostitution are also well known. Cllr Nelson lists some of them, though he doesn't list the underlying driving forces:</p> <p>The lack of quality sex education in schools, and in families, that deals with long term relationship building, abuse, coercion, drugs, domination and violence, and the right to say 'No' for boys and girls;</p> <p>The unavailability of youth service provision;</p> <p>The unwillingness of the state to protect refugee children and women, many of whom have a right to be in the UK;</p>

	<p>The acceptance of violence as a part of relationships, often pushed through social media;</p> <p>The culture of abuse, where drugs are used to manipulate children and young people into multi partner sex and prostitution;</p> <p>The proliferation of pornography, sex as entertainment and the objectivisation of women and girls.</p> <p>Benefit cuts that drive mothers into Prostitution to protect their children from hunger and want.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Nelson repeated his question as he did not feel the Cabinet Member had addressed it in her response and he hoped for a full and honest answer as the Cabinet Member would normally do.</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member made the following response.</p> <p>"I find it incredible that every question in relation to this matter has been asked by a man. Some might say it smacks of prurience particularly as many one those asking these questions voted in favour of the lap dancing club licensing policy, allowing such a club, to open in the town centre.</p> <p>I want to make my position quite clear. I am not, never have been and never would vote for the legalisation of prostitution in any of its forms: pornography, licensed brothels, legalisation of street sex work or child sex exploitation.</p> <p>The world of prostitution is inherently dangerous as Anne Marie Foy explained</p> <p>'You're never safe," she says. "It's like, every car you get into, you don't know whether you're going to get out."</p> <p>These words were spoken by Anne Marie Foy, a 46 year old woman, who had home and a family, but was in thrall to drug dealers. They were spoken just a couple of weeks before she was murdered.</p> <p>It is a very dangerous occupation. Some 190 street sex workers have been murdered since 1990.</p> <p>Like many in the sex trade, she was, as a youngster, lured into drugs, and in order to feed her habit, into prostitution.</p> <p>Others are groomed as children and as in Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham are abused and used by supposed boyfriends and their abusive circle. All too often, local authorities have shirked from their duty and failed to ensure that children and young people are safe and prepared adequately for the world they face outside school. Although today, with sexting, cyberbullying, intimidation and plain ignorance, children and young people are placed at risk in a modern and possibly secretive way.</p> <p>"For children over 10, sexual exploitation is the most pressing and hidden child protection issue in this country."(Anne Marie Carrie, Barnardo's)</p> <p>'Children over 10...' The risk is real. Prostitution encompasses a range of activities: child sex exploitation, pornography, grooming and trafficking.</p>
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The report by Barnardo's, 'Puppet on a String' which looked at the issue and and Safe and Sound in Derby, where the stages of grooming were researched and reported showed just how urgent and widespread the problem is.

However, so much harm is done, through social media, television, film and pornography - particularly with young boys, that recently, even the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, chaired by Maria Miller MP has said that sex education in schools is inadequate and more needs to be done now.

The report outlines evidence that:  
almost a third (29%) of 16-18 year old girls say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school

nearly three-quarters (71%) of all 16-18 year old boys and girls say they hear terms such as "slut" or "slag" used towards girls at schools on a regular basis

59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 said in 2014 that they had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college

The Report states: Despite calls from parents, teachers and young people for action to address sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, the Committee found that neither OFSTED nor the Department for Education has a coherent plan to tackle this issue and to monitor the scale of the problem.

For many of us, parents, and carers, speaking about sex to children is difficult. We rely on teachers to talk to our children and ensure they are prepared for the world outside school. If sex education is inadequate, then a rigorous national curriculum for sex education needs to be developed.

Sexualisation is for sale on the high street, from clothing for girls to sex shops and SEVs. A recent report by the University of Leeds found that the average age for lap dancers across 20 areas was between 18-53.

That means that a sixth former could be a lap dancer legally while still at school. Don't you think that they should have the best in sex education, wherever they live, rather than the piecemeal approach that we have now?

Children and young people up to the age of 18 need access to age related and appropriate sex education.

Girlguiding's Advocate panel, a group of 14-25 year olds who represent Girlguiding's young members, said:

"As young women, many of us are still in school and experience or witness sexual harassment from groping to cat calling on a daily basis. It's humiliating and frightening and affects what we wear, where we go, our body image and our confidence to speak out in class. Yet, it's often dismissed as 'banter' or a 'compliment' and we are told we are overreacting or being over sensitive.

It needs to stop. Schools should be safe and empowering places and we should feel able to learn without fear. That's why we need a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment where schools take the issue seriously, sex and relationship education is compulsory, and schools are held accountable for preventing and tackling sexual

	<p>harassment."</p> <p>In a point of order, Councillor Harman requested that Members be given proper answers to properly tabled questions.</p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles, Councillor Flo Clucas</b>
	<p>The Cabinet Member for Healthy Lifestyles often stands up for women in society and speaks up for women when addressing the Chamber. Does she agree with the reported comments from Cheltenham Fems: "With these gross and irresponsible comments Parsons has shown himself to be ignorant about the realities of the sex industry..... Prostitution is built upon the misery and desperation of some of the most vulnerable women in society....."</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>My views have been made known to CheltFems.</p> <p>Government is able to change the lives of those who are vulnerable by ensuring that they are not driven into 'misery and desperation' through benefit cuts, lack of affordable childcare, lack of affordable housing, effective and available youth service provision and hunger.</p> <p>If there was no market, Prostitution would not exist.</p> <p>In a point of order, Councillor Nelson said he did not know who the Cabinet Member was referring to in her response but he wished to make it clear that he personally did not vote in support of a lapdancing club.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Nelson said he was amazed that the Cabinet Member and her colleagues were spending so much time protecting their colleague when the comments made had been so widely reported. He asked again whether the Cabinet Member would respond to the remarks made by the Cheltenham Fems?</p> <p>The Cabinet Member replied that she had responded directly to Cheltenham Fems but she was not prepared to make her response public at Council without the consent of the other party. In her view, a lot of the problems were down to government cuts. She considered it was not appropriate to use this very important issue as a political football as it needed a serious debate.</p>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor John Payne to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>I have been advised that Councillor Parson's provocative and demeaning comments at the Liberal Democrat Conference did not engage the Cheltenham Borough Council Code of Members' Conduct. However, do you agree that speaking in his role as Chairman of the Cheltenham Liberal Democrats he has grossly exceeded his remit, and in so doing has damaged the reputation of the Liberal Democrat Group and this Council?'</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>I am assuming that Cllr Payne like me wasn't at the debate in question and so is basing what he says purely on the press coverage. I refer him to my answer to Qu 3</p>

	as to the facts of what happened.
	I do not agree that Cllr Parsons has damaged the reputation of the Council.
<b>8.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Adam Lillywhite to the Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	<p>All Saints Rd (ASR) has not had its traffic volume counted in this latest round of monitoring despite frequent requests to have this included over the last three years and categorical assurances from GCC that the impact of the CTP would be monitored. In the last six weeks ASR has seen a tremendous traffic increases which mean that queues from the Prestbury rd roundabout now extend back as far as All Saints Church, and the Cotswold Grange Hotel, whereas as before they rarely extended beyond Pittville Circus. ASR was predicted to have a 6% increase in traffic yet It has clearly already received considerably more than this and Boots Corner has only been restricted, not even closed.</p> <p>Please outline how this already blatant failure of the traffic modelling is being addressed other than by attempting to ignore it?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Colleagues from GCC have advised that the premise of this question is incorrect.</p> <p>All Saints Road was included within the survey sites which were monitored for a two week period up to 25<sup>th</sup> September 2016. This period was chosen as it represented a "return to normality" with schools back in operation.</p> <p>GCC now use Radar equipment, which is attached to street light columns or road signs, rather than the traditional tube equipment, which is very conspicuous.</p> <p>There are a total of 28 survey sites across the town and an initial review of the data suggests that All Saints Road is one of eight survey sites which has seen an increase in traffic flow; an average increase of +2.59% over a 24 hour period. This is well below expected daily variation (+/-5%) and slightly higher than the DfT estimated natural traffic growth for minor roads within Cheltenham between 2015 and 2016 (+1.72%).</p> <p>Looking at the peak periods on All Saints Road, the data is showing an average 11 vehicle increase in traffic flow in the AM peak hour (+1.39%) and 43 vehicle increase in the PM peak hour (+6.75%).</p> <p>The increase in traffic on All Saints Road from the 2015 and 2016 surveys is in line with the DfT estimated traffic growth and daily variation for minor roads in Cheltenham (+6.72%). We will continue to review the traffic volumes around Cheltenham following construction of each phase of the CTP to ensure the safe operation of the network.</p> <p>Additionally GCC have received positive feedback from cyclists and bus operators.</p> <p>Stagecoach Service B is the main beneficiary and this route sees about 7,000 people use the route every week. By using the bus lane it means a shorter route into the town and saves about 1,500 miles per annum. That's great for the environment as Stagecoach will use about 190 less gallons of diesel. The shorter route will see everyone travelling on the B from the London Road and Charlton Kings area arrive in the town centre about 2 minutes quicker than they did before the bus lane was completed - more at times when there is particularly heavy congestion on Fairview Road.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Lillywhite noted that the direction of this traffic was not specified? He said he found it difficult to believe that an extra 11 vehicles per hour was responsible for the increased queues regularly extending an additional 90 metres. Stagecoach may use 190 gallons less but the rest of the town will be using 1000s more! Phase 1 has not yet been fully implemented, there have been no planned road closures and the additional congestion is widespread and reported in the media,</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member please tell me how the public can register their concern and how <u>you</u> will be acting upon these?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member did not accept the assertions Councillor Lillywhite had made in his question. The traffic modelling data was supplied by Gloucestershire County Council and therefore he was not in a position to personally verify it. His understanding was that phase 1 of the transport scheme had been fully implemented and he suggested Councillor Lillywhite should address any formal complaints to GCC via their website.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Adam Lillywhite to the Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b></p> <p>The term ‘severe’ traffic congestion was used for Cheltenham in recent months by the Planning Inspector with regard to the Leckhampton Appeal. Given that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Severe’ is the highest warning we could have received and is sufficient in itself to prevent housing development,</li> <li>• We are still awaiting the outcome of the GCC traffic modelers with regard to the likely impact of the JCS,</li> <li>• We already have greatly increased congestion after only minor restrictions at Boots Corner,</li> <li>• The only two statutory consultations on the CTP have stated emphatically that the residents of the town are against it,</li> <li>• GCC Traffic Authority have failed to monitor the impact of the first phase of the scheme despite categoric assurances,</li> <li>• The Traffic modelers predictions have already failed by underestimating the impact of just the first phase of the plan on ASR.</li> </ul> <p>Does the Cabinet member for Development continue to support the CTP which is an entirely Liberal Democrat backed scheme, against cross party opposition. Do you still believe you can claim a mandate to greatly reduce the resilience and intentionally slash the capacity of this town’s road network?</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>I refer to my previous response which identifies that the outcome from phase 1 of the Cheltenham Transport Plan is within expectations and that GCC as the CBC partner have delivered in line with commitments.</p> <p>In addition it must be noted that terms like severe are subjective and make no reference to potential mitigation.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Lillywhite advised that the GCC portfolio holder for Infrastructure and Planning had already warned of severe congestion for much of Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. Tomorrow Council are set to debate the JCS, yet the promised traffic modeling is delayed, so yet again it will not be available.</p> <p>Could the Cabinet Member explain why the implementation of the next phase of the Transport plan will <u>not</u> take into account this delay and wait for the release of the modeling, instead bulldozing on to <u>intentionally</u> reduce the capacity and resilience of Cheltenham's road network?</p> <p>In response of the Cabinet Member advised that the traffic modelling for the JCS had been done separately and was available on the Council's website so there was no reason why the implementation of the CTP should be delayed.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Adam Lillywhite to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b></p> <p>After Dennis Parsons spoke at the LD National Congress, he was asked to resign by his local party's leader and the National Party Leader distanced himself as much as possible. From this action and the verbatim quote taken from the major national newspapers below, Dennis Parsons intent is clear, it does not appear to be misunderstood or a rhetorical question as he has decided to try and claim. Can the leader please explain why this action was taken to save the reputation of the LD party yet nothing is being done to save the reputation of Cheltenham Borough Council which has been significantly damaged by this representative. Leadership is not just about evading tricky questions, you have a responsibility to this town, that is over and above your responsibility to your party. Do you and your party continue to support this person and his views over and above the reputation of this town.</p> <p><i>'The fact that we are asking "should we seek to prevent people entering sex work?" is part of the problem.</i></p> <p><i>'You wouldn't ask the question "should we prevent people becoming accountants?" You'd just take it for granted.</i></p> <p><i>'There is a stronger case, probably, for that than there is for preventing sex work.</i></p> <p><i>'We have had a chap suggest that one of the areas we need to be concerned about was families coercing people to go into the sex trade.</i></p> <p><i>'Well, again, you wouldn't protest at families urging and coercing people into becoming accountants.</i></p> <p><i>'And even in this room full of liberals we have got a huge cultural problem that we do see sex work as different.</i></p> <p><i>'We see it as something a little bit tacky, and not quite nice, and not the sort of thing that we would want our sons and daughters to get involved in.</i></p> <p><i>'We talk about schools - how many schools are going to have careers officers say to people, "have you thought about prostitution?"</i></p> <p><i>'It's not going to happen. And that's a cultural thing. Why shouldn't they? Why shouldn't they?</i></p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>See my answer to Qu 3. To avoid confusion I haven't asked Cllr Parsons to resign and have no intention of doing so.</p> <p>In supplementary question, Councillor Lillywhite commented that Tim Farron, the</p>

	<p>National party leader certainly does not believe this was 'out of context', 'misquoted', 'misinterpreted' or 'merely rhetorical' and the Councillor was asked to resign by Martin Horwood. In Dennis Parson's resignation speech, he stated that "In my view, we are conditioned as a society to see sex work as unsavoury"..... again implying that he thinks that it is only our conditioning that makes us see it as unsavoury. People are concerned about the systematic abuse, degradation and exploitation of these vulnerable young people many of whom may already have complex social and psychological problems. He asked the Cabinet Member what would his party be doing to ensure that the children of this town are safe from these views?</p> <p>The Leader responded that a sensible debate was needed on this matter and he was not prepared to respond to attributions which may or may not be accurate.</p>
<b>11.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Adam Lillywhite to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b></p> <p>Councillors in this chamber have a duty to listen to the concerns of their constituents, so how should we respond when asked by a constituent whose daughter, planning to leave school to take up a career in prostitution, might usefully spend her time off before starting her apprenticeship?</p> <p>Have we really considered what Cllr Parsons is trying to advocate: "Why shouldn't they? Why shouldn't they?" he said in Brighton.</p> <p>How can we, as Councillors, represent and promote this council to our constituents when it is so blatantly clear that the Liberal Democrat party is too concerned with its own political majority in this chamber and shows no willingness to act on its words on safeguarding and the protection of minors. I suggest that you 'talk the talk' admirably but you don't 'walk the walk' on this critical matter.</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>See my answers to Qu 3 &amp; 4.</p> <p>I suspect it is lack of discussion of the issues around prostitution that causes more problems than discussing them. I suggest Cllr Lillywhite takes up the offer of discussion with Cllr Parsons.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Lillywhite commented that education was supposed to increase a young person's confidence and self-esteem and he asked the Cabinet Member what he believed would be the impact when on leaving school a child was formally advised to take up prostitution.</p> <p>The Leader replied that he would be more than happy to give his views when Council had a proper debate on the matter.</p>
<b>12.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Adam Lillywhite to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b></p> <p>What sort of a party acts to protect itself, yet fails to take action to protect the young and most vulnerable in their care at the most pivotal moment of their life, instead it shelters a member who would like to promote a life of danger, fear and degradation for them. Can you please explain this 'Liberal' attitude which means that 'all views have to be accommodated' and he has to be kept in the party no matter what his</p>



	opinions.
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>See my answer to Qu 3 &amp; 4.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Councillor Lillywhite said the Liberal Democrats claim to stand up for those that are oppressed and to give rights to the younger generation. May I suggest that on this occasion you do not stand up for the self-oppressed or continue to offer him a safe haven, and that your Party forgoes giving the younger generation "<u>the right</u>" to this type of career advice. His question had not been seeking views on sex education but was asking the reason why Cllr Parsons was advocating a career in prostitution to school leavers.</p> <p>The Leader responded that no one had been advocating this and reiterated that an informed debate would be useful.</p>
<b>13.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries</b>
	The Cabinet recently agreed to spend £500,000 on the open market to buy 2 houses to add to its housing stock. With proper forward planning and more urgency, this money could have been better spent. How much more affordable accommodation could have been acquired if this money had been spent on developments of council owned land, such as former garage sites or car parks?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Various issues preclude the redevelopment of garage sites or car parks as they are inherently complex with title restrictions and rights of way affecting a number of the sites, with costs varying depending on complexity of the site and the number of homes being built. These challenges are compounded by the limited number of available council-owned sites on which to develop. The government-imposed time limits fail to take reasonable account of these challenges.</p> <p>This year the council has developed 10 new affordable homes with a further 10 to be developed in February. There is the potential to build a further 40 new homes subject to the relevant approvals and any rights of way issues being resolved.</p> <p>We remain committed to increasing the provision of affordable homes for Cheltenham residents. Acquiring new homes on the open market will continue to be supported when the right to buy receipts are at risk of not being used within government-imposed time limits. Increasing the provision of affordable housing in this way is far more preferable than returning the right to buy receipts to the government, with interest.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Nelson said that he had not had an answer to his question and so repeated it.</p> <p>The Leader referred to member to the response already given and said that if the Member asked the same question he would get the same answer.</p>
<b>14</b>	<b>Question from Chris Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	Why is it that the Leader did not do more to protect the Banksy artwork in his ward of All Saints?

	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Cllr Nelson will be aware that the cabinet has recently published a briefing note outlining everything done to protect the Banksy since it first appeared. I have been involved in and encouraged that process. Clearly the council's ability to intervene is limited by the law which isn't designed to protect a Banksy and that the property owner was less than cooperative.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Nelson asked why the Leader had not considered the use of a Perspex screen to cover the Banksy.</p> <p>The Leader highlighted that the building was not owned by the council and so their powers were limited and it was only the owner of the building who could make such decisions.</p>
<b>15.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>Cheltenham has a number of areas of severe deprivation. In fact, a child born in Cheltenham's most deprived neighbourhood has a 9 year lower life expectancy than one born in the most affluent. The Liberal Democrats have been in charge of Cheltenham Council for most of the last 30 years. So why is it that this Council administration has not done more to combat this severe deprivation?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Tackling deprivation is a long term issue and can't be done as a quick fix or be achieved by a single agency such as this council. Under the Liberal Democrats this council introduced policies and initiatives to improve the lives of people in the areas referred to and has worked consistently to achieve them for many years. This has been done successfully in partnership with other agencies and most importantly with the support of the local communities.</p> <p>This council has a long and proud track record of investing in our most deprived communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From 1996 to 2001 the Council managed a £1.3m Single Regeneration Budget scheme in the West End area of the town centre that delivered £6m worth of investment that went into housing, the street-scape, local business growth and community facilities. This work continues to date through the work of Cheltenham West End Partnership.</li> <li>• The Council, working with Cheltenham Borough Homes, oversaw the complete regeneration of the St. Pauls estate which at one point was in the 5% most deprived areas in the country. The transformation has seen the construction of 48 new properties and transformational improvements to the remainder of the stock in the area. The area is now sustainable and cohesive.</li> <li>• In 1995, the Council was instrumental in establishing Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project Partnership followed in 1998 by the Hesters Way Partnership. The council has overseen a programme of significant housing-led investment in the area, plus the construction of two resource centres at Hesters Way and Springbank. The partnership and neighbourhood project remain very active in supporting the ongoing regeneration of Hesters Way and Springbank.</li> <li>• In 1997, the Council was instrumental in establishing the then Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors (now Oakley) Neighbourhood Project and the Regeneration Partnership in 1998. The neighbourhood project and</li> </ul>

	<p>regeneration partnership successfully supported improvements to Clyde Crescent public open space and built the Oakley Resource Centre which was opened in February 2008. The council is supporting the joint trustees of the neighbourhood project and regeneration partnership throughout the current difficulties and are committed to playing a proactive role in supporting local residents in the future.</p> <p>In terms of addressing health inequalities that Cllr. Nelson refers to, the Council has worked hard to get better health services for residents living in our most deprived communities. For instance, we now have healthy living centres in Springbank (GP practice and dentist) and Hesters Way Resource Centres.</p> <p>In addition, whilst the Council no longer directly delivers healthy lifestyles activities, we have commissioned the Cheltenham Trust to deliver these on our behalf. We have asked the Trust to have a specific focus on delivering activities targeted at people from lower socio-economic groups – some of the activities they deliver include street games projects in Hesters Way and Oakley, Healthy Walks programmes, plus projects to encourage low income families to use leisure@Cheltenham.</p> <p>However, over the years this has been done in the teeth of opposition from some members from Cllr Nelson's party who opposed the level of effort put in to these areas. It has also been achieved against the background of sometimes unhelpful policies at national level which includes the current government.</p> <p>The council remains committed to supporting all our communities, including those that are defined as being most deprived to address the issues that Cllr. Nelson refers to.</p>
<b>16.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman</b>
	<p>Is it correct that a majority of respondents to the recent consultation on recycling rejected the option of doing kerb side collections every 3 weeks. Have you now finally rejected this silly, unpopular and undemocratic proposal or do you remain determined to introduce bin collections every 3 weeks?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Here we go again. As you well know, I am personally opposed to moving to the collection of landfill waste bins every three weeks. As you also well know, the Liberal Democrat administration is opposed to moving such collections to every three weeks. I have absolutely no idea where or how you have formed the view that I am "determined" to make such a change but I very much hope that this is the last time you make such silly claims which serve only to confuse residents.</p> <p>As you know, every advance in recycling performance in Cheltenham has come when the Liberal Democrats have been in control. In the recent local elections, where we won 75% of the available seats, we put forward a manifesto commitment to further improve the recycling service in our town.</p> <p>In July, we ran a public consultation around the waste and recycling service in Cheltenham. We did so because we firmly believe in keeping in touch with the views of residents. Over 1800 people replied. On 5th August, you were sent an email with details about the results of the survey. If you did not read it, it remains on the Intranet site which you have access to. The results clearly showed how much our recycling service is valued and how much people hope we can keep improving it. The results</p>

	<p>also showed, in very general terms, that 50% of respondents did not support a move to three weekly collections. I'll let you research the views of the other 50%.</p> <p>Today we have launched the second round of consultation and Members will have by now had the opportunity to attend an All-Member Seminar to hear about the plans. The consultation features three options including retaining the kerbside box (Option A) and moving to a commingled service (Option C).</p> <p>It is also right to say that there is an option which would move the landfill waste collection to a three weekly service although recycling would be collected every week (Option B). In case there is any doubt, and I know that three paragraphs have passed since I last spelled this out, this Administration does not support moving to a three weekly collection of landfill waste.</p> <p>Option B is in the consultation because it is substantially cheaper than the other options and increases the frequency of recycling collections. Whilst we do not support the moving to a three weekly collection of landfill waste, I feel it perfectly reasonable to ask residents for their views given the potential benefits that they may see with such a service. I accept entirely that half of the respondents to the previous survey said that they wouldn't support a three weekly collection but I do note that the other half didn't respond in such terms.</p> <p>I feel that I may need to remind Members once again that we would not under any circumstances move to a three weekly collection of landfill waste unless a significant number of residents supported such a change.</p> <p>And finally, to be clear, I am and my party are opposed to moving to a three weekly collection of landfill waste and I very much hope that everyone is now clear on that. I trust that our views will not be misrepresented again.</p> <p>In a supplementary question, Councillor Nelson asked why the council was spending so much money on a consultation when of the three options proposed in the consultation, the Cabinet Member appeared to be ruling out option B and C leaving only A which was maintaining the status quo.</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member indicated that although he personally did not support option B, it was important to go out to consultation with an open mind. The Liberal Democrats had made a very clear commitment in their manifesto to improve recycling and consult widely on the existing service. For that reason he felt the consultation was a reasonable way to launch any service improvements.</p>
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## **9. PETITION REGARDING CHANGES TO THE C BUS ROUTE IN SPRINGBANK**

The Mayor outlined the procedure for dealing with the petition and invited Mrs Doreen Spiers (Friends of Springbank) and Andy Hayes (Hesters Way Partnership) as petition organisers, to formally present the petition.

Mrs Spiers, a resident in Springbank and a regular user of the C Service, refuted the claim that the changes had benefited any residents. Andy Hayes commended Doreen for having initiated the petition, which had garnered over 1000 signatures. He urged the Council to support a request that Stagecoach undertake a consultation exercise on the change to the C Service; namely the removal of the service to Springbank Way in its entirety. Whilst Stagecoach had calculated "that most customers using the affected stops on Springbank Way will need to walk a maximum of 2 minutes further to the nearest bus", which equated to 'only' 500m, the majority of people that used the C Service were not physically able to walk this distance. The change to this service had impacted some residents' ability to access not only the local shops, but the resource centre which housed the Doctors surgery which had over 200+ registered patients and received 60,000 visits a year, as well as a Dentist surgery, Pharmacy and childcare facility and it was noted that this building was owned by Cheltenham Borough Council. The service had changed on the 01 May 2016, without any public consultation or Equality Impact Assessment having been undertaken by Stagecoach, they had simply advised the Transport Board of the intended changes and then implemented them. Stagecoach cited punctuality as the reason for the change, having given no consideration to residents needs, and stated that since the change punctuality had increased by 2.37% between May and August 2016, which the petitioner did not consider as much of an improvement. He appreciated that this council was not the local transport authority but hoped that it could put pressure on Gloucestershire County Council, to have Stagecoach review their decision in light of the petition.

Members were aware that Rupert Cox, Managing Director of Stagecoach West, was present in the public gallery and suggested that, having expressed his willingness to answer Member questions, the matter should be debated at this meeting. The Cabinet Member Development and Safety had been minded to refer the matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but was comfortable to debate the issue at Council, if that was Members' preference.

Councillor Stennett formally proposed that the matter be debated at this meeting, with Councillor Clucas as his seconder.

Councillor Colin Hay raised a point of order. He felt that the issue would be easier to debate at Overview and Scrutiny as the usual rules of debate could be dis-applied with the Chairman of the Committee using their discretion to allow non-committee Members to speak and ask questions.

Upon a vote it was RESOLVED that the matter be debated at this meeting.

The Mayor was advised that it was at her discretion to extend the time allowed for the debate.

Rupert Cox, Managing Director of Stagecoach West gave the following responses to Member questions;

- As outlined in the report, the problem with the service prior to the change on the 01 May 2016 was that Stagecoach were not able to deliver the level of punctuality on Service C that they or their customers

would expect, with 1 in 10 of the buses running late, compared to 1 in 20 across the network. Members were reminded that the service only ever ran in one direction and increased congestion, poor traffic light priority at key junctions and parking issues on residential streets, had all played a part in making journeys run late and these small delays regularly escalated into gaps in their timetable. He clarified that punctuality was up from 90% to 93% which equated to 25% of the buses for that particular service. To mitigate the walking time for some residents, the route for Service B was extended, which was actually closer for some people and this service journeyed through to the Town Centre. The only solution for solving the punctuality problem on the Service C would have been the introduction of an additional vehicle, which would have resulted in a 33% cost increase, but there would not have been a third more users to cover this cost.

- The C Service was carrying approximately 12,000 passengers a week, which was about the same level as before the change had been introduced, but he was aware that some people were using the Service B. He was fairly confident that some people were using the service more and some were using it less.
- Stagecoach was a private company providing a public service and he recognised that for this very reason, they couldn't simply do as they wanted. Their ultimate aim was to increase the number of people that used buses.
- 90% of the services run by Stagecoach were run on an entirely commercial basis. At present, Stagecoach did provide some services on behalf of the County Council. He believed that the County Council were considering changes to this service and Stagecoach, would, at that time bid to provide that service.
- The first phase of the Transport Plan had resulted in mixed fortunes for Stagecoach bus services. Route B had benefited from the work to Albion Street, as it had reduced the distance it needed to travel, however, it had been unfortunate that these works had coincided with the closure of North Parade. He had reviewed statistics for the A40, A4019 and Tewkesbury Road and commented that they did not make for comfortable reading, given that the A40 corridor was an important route for both Cheltenham and Gloucester. The 94 Service, which used the A40 corridor was one of the most important services in the County, which over the last 15 years had seen its peak running time increase by 90%, which was the largest increase for any service in the UK which he considered was not acceptable. Longer journeys cost more money as they required more buses and costly fuel and ultimately pushed people to use their cars, which meant less people using buses. He was aware that there were proposals for bus priority measures and whilst he appreciated that buses were not the only solution for greener travel, any solutions would be welcome and Stagecoach were eager to discuss solutions with the County Council.
- Unlike public bodies, Stagecoach were not required to undertake public consultation. They had to register any changes with the Transport

Board at least 56 days before the implementation date and often did so 6-8 weeks before. In this case, Stagecoach had written to Councillors in wards that were affected and in January, they had also held a Member seminar to allow Councillors to discuss any changes ahead of the 1 May implementation. In some cases this had led to further local debates and Stagecoach had attended Parish Council meetings. He admitted that regardless of any consultation, the fundamental issue was that the service was not commercially viable and the outcome would have been the same. With 15 years of experience, he could guarantee that had they reduced the frequency of Service C less people would have used the service and he predicted that it numbers would reduce by 30-50%, which would impact the entire service not only the route and as a company they needed to consider the service in its entirety. Independent research by Transport Focus showed that punctuality and frequency of bus services was most important to service users.

- Stagecoach did work closely with the Integrated Transport Department, though there was always scope to do more and he was sometimes frustrated by the speed at which improvements were delivered.
- He had been closely monitoring the JCS and whilst some of the proposed developments would provide exciting opportunities to existing routes, he had some serious concerns that some would not be serviceable, but was unwilling to go into any detail.
- Stagecoach worked to the Transport Act 1986 following bus deregulation. Bus operators could decide where it could run services commercially and where not and the Integrated Transport departments in that area would could decide what services it wants to subsidise. He stressed that Cheltenham had a good commercial service, which was not replicated in other areas and those areas were being subjected to cuts.
- Gloucestershire County Council set the rules in relation to when and where people could use concession passes and it was the County Council that had decided that a £1 charge applied to those with a concession pass that got on a bus at a Park and Ride facility. He could appreciate why the public felt this absurd.
- Profits meant that Stagecoach were able to keep investing in vehicles, which in Cheltenham were on average half the age of those in Gloucestershire. An app had been developed that would allow people to monitor bus times in real time and this would be further developed in the future to allow people to buy tickets.
- Off peak services did run in areas in the town but this was not something which could easily be replicated for Service C.

- There were some junctions in the Springbank area and a long section of Welch Road which was a single carriageway which had delayed the Service C. Stagecoach were not completely inflexible and if something was to change in relation to this congestion, then the decision could be revisited. Parking controls around the Springbank area, which were enforced and adhered to and the installation of a bus lane on Tewkesbury Road would result in journeys on this route being a minute or two quicker and allow Stagecoach to reinstate the service.

The Cabinet Member Development and Safety suggested that rather than move into a formal debate now, the matter should now be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members agreed that the committee should be asked to look at bus services in general and how it can be done better in Cheltenham, rather than focussing on particular services. Councillor Malcolm seconded the motion.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

**RESOLVED that the matter be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who be asked to review bus services in general and how they could be better provided in Cheltenham.**

#### **10. VISION 2020: BUSINESS CASE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY COMPANY**

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services, Councillor Whyborn, introduced the report. He described the motions before council as simple and in themselves uncontroversial, namely to respectively appoint Paul Jones and Councillor Steve Jordan, both of whom he considered to be eminently suited to the roles, to the posts of continuing Section 151 Officer, and Member representative of Cheltenham Borough Council, to the planned Support Services Company.

Recommendation 6 noted the retention of the Revenues and Benefits service by Cheltenham Borough Council consequent to the decision of Cabinet not to move it from the Joint Committee to the new company.

The Cabinet Member explained how the project had originated as a result of Central Government's aspiration to promote innovative and cost-effective solutions to delivering local authority services, and Cheltenham had first-hand experience of shared services in Gloucestershire and the use of a Teckal companies. At the time, Ubico was unique in being a shared service and a company using the Teckal exemption, meaning the service ran largely as an in-house service and did not have to go out to EU-type tendering. Government grant funding (TCA funding) was available and the 2020 project councils were able to secure £3.8m for business transformation and related costs. Further financial advantage would result from the fact that new employees would be engaged on terms outside of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The initial vision, which was largely the one which other partner authorities were still working to, was a group of companies which would employ all employees and include all in-house services including Democratic Services, etc.



Only Statutory Officers were to be outside of the scheme, with their services being seconded from the companies and not surprisingly this revolutionary approach has proved hugely controversial. Though early pioneers in shared services and arms-length services, Cheltenham has always adopted a “one size does not fit all” approach and decided at an early stage that it would not include the following: Regulatory services; Wellbeing and Culture; Legal and Building Control; Property; Democratic Services; Media; Elections; Community; Customer Relations; Bereavement; Green Space and Client and Commissioning officers, as well as social housing services already in CBH.

He had spoken at length on the issue of Customer Services (CS) and Revenues and Benefits (R&B) at a recent scrutiny meeting and Members seminar, to say, in short, that the relatively modest savings involved, compared to the potential reputational risk to the council, did not justify the change. The administration considered these to be highly sensitive front-line services, which were best directly staffed by the Council and managed locally, unlike GO Shared Services and ICT.

These services were already largely shared and the only question was whether to take further advantage of a Teckal Company. There would be no immediate advantage to CBC as staff were already shared and on the payroll of other authorities, but there would be a long term gain and moreover, preliminary costings for reverting the services to CBC, were expensive in terms of both revenue and capital. Cabinet’s conclusion was that these were precisely the back office services which benefited from being shared with other councils and indeed many economies of scale had already been realised. There were a lot of governance and structural issues that needed to be worked through with the partner authorities, which he suggested stemmed from very different political perspectives, but after a great deal of negotiation, facilitated by LGA representatives, agreement was reached on the 34 points listed in the report. Of particular importance had been the right to have a Members director; that Trade Unions would be recognised; that no changes would be made that would be detrimental to one or more of the partners, even if of benefit to others; and that the company would make information available to Councillors to enable them to do their jobs.

The proposal agreed at Council, was, he suggested, a logical extension of the Teckal company principle, which had been so successful for Ubico and as in the case of Ubico, the Teckal exemption, would provide opportunities to sell services to others, as well as allowing the council to run a company at the cost of services, in some respects, as an in-house service would be run rather than requiring competitive tendering as a full trading company would. The inclusion of the ICT services would increase resilience, create opportunities for improved technology, including new telephony to replace the CBC exchange which had come to the end of its working life and this would result in better tools for officers, including the Customer Services Team. The Cabinet Member Corporate Services hoped that Members would be able to support the recommendations and moved the resolutions.

The Mayor invited questions from Members and details of these and the responses that were provided are detailed below:

- In February 2016 Cabinet approved the business case for sharing CS and R&B with the 2020 partners and these documents showed the overall risk to the delivery of outcomes as 'RED' for the very option (keeping in-house) of what was being proposed today. Paragraph 10.4 of the report being considered today, noted that as a result of the council's more limited exposure to the partnership, the share of programme costs for this council had reduced, but this decision also resulted in a lost saving of £1.6m over the next 10 years. What were the financial implications of the decision to remove these services from 2020?
- The Cabinet Member advised that the implication on the revenue savings was an annual reduction of £159K but the non-recurring costs would reduce substantially because the council would need to contribute less to the ongoing programme costs and he considered the council had got a good deal on this in their negotiations with the partnership.
- A Member highlighted that in February the reputational risks of not putting these services into the partnership had scored highly on the risk assessment in terms of likelihood and impact. Why the change now?
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that these had not been included in the risk assessment. He felt that they would be difficult to score as essentially it was a question of whether partners would deliver these services to not only the same quality, but to the same ethos to which CBC currently delivers. He also commented that risk assessments were subjective and based on someone's interpretation.
- Members had been told previously that the inclusion of CS would result in being able to provide an enhanced service, with extended opening hours and 24hr telephone support: by not including this service were residents of Cheltenham being disadvantaged?
- The Cabinet Member suggested that there were other means of providing an enhanced service and building resilience and this involved taking a holistic approach. Various options were being considered and CBH were closely involved in this.
- Why, when only 8 months ago were CS and R&B to be included because of all the associated benefits, were they no longer to be included?
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the decision in February, to include these two services, was the wrong one. When the interim arrangements had been put in place it had always been made clear that they were subject to review. He acknowledged that a matter which had exercised many Councillors throughout this process was that collaboration could result in a loss of control or influence over important front-line services. He felt that this could not be addressed by contractual or structural arrangements but was instead a matter of political, ethical and practical judgement which only elected Members could take. He had personally wrestled with this issue and despite reassurances from senior officers, he had not been satisfied. He felt that Members needed to evaluate to what extent they believed that other partners were willing and able to deliver shared services to not only the quality, but also the ethos, to which CBC was currently delivering them.

It was his judgement that the sensitivities to the public in relation to CS and R&B were huge and the cost savings relatively modest in comparison. Of the many people that visited CBC on a daily basis, many were from deprived communities and not IT literate and for them, face-to-face contact with officers and Members was important and the level of service expected in Cheltenham was arguably different to that expected of our partners. Whilst this was not easily quantified, it was a fact that the partner councils were rural and with a different political party in control and it should therefore be expected that they have a very different set of values in terms of the service that should be provided. It was for these reasons collectively, that it was his judgement that such services were best provided directly by this administration and staffed and managed locally.

A number of Members voiced concerns about the recommendations and these comments included:

- Councillor Tim Harman, speaking as Leader of the Conservatives, said his group had been supportive of the principle of shared services for some time. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a group of cross party Members, had expressed concerns about the decision to retain CS and R&B given the £159k saving that would have been generated as well the enhanced service and resilience it would have created. They felt that this was a missed opportunity and asked that the Cabinet Member revisit his decision and this had not happened.
- The Cabinet report in February had set out all the risks associated with such a decision and they were not confident that these issues had been mitigated.
- A Member highlighted that waste collection was a front-facing service which the council had shared as part of Ubico and there had been no adverse effects on the council's reputation. They also noted that the £159k saving that would not be realised as a result of this decision, could have helped enable the Cabinet Member Clean and Green in achieving his recycling ambitions and for these reasons alone, the recommendation should be rethought.
- A Member felt it was disingenuous to suggest that residents would not be able to access services in person at the council offices if they were included in 2020. Improved technology would enable staff to provide a better service to customers however they chose to access Customer Services.
- Realising the £159K savings could also have been used to avoid having to increase council tax by £5 next year.
- A Member who had been an officer at Worcestershire County Council advised that Worcestershire had delivered everything that had been described in the Cabinet report of February 2016 back in 2004 and so their success should be looked at.
- Part of the rationale for restructuring CBC and the subsequent retirement of the previous Chief Executive, was that we wanted to deliver savings and having gone through that process, 8 months on, £159k of the savings that were identified, would not be delivered.

Members speaking in support of the recommendations made the following comments:

- Austerity meant that some residents were financially vulnerable and found the face-to-face advice and support that officers provided invaluable.
- Whilst shared services had proved broadly successful in the cases of CBH, Ubico and One Legal, they felt that 2020 posed a rural/urban issue, which was cultural in nature rather than entirely political. The Member had asked the question of whether the pension problem would be solved by the inclusion of all services in 2020 and had been advised that it would not. Whilst the other partners were planning to include all services within one organisation, it had never been this council's intention to adopt such an approach, instead deciding to share services with a variety of partners.
- A Member referenced the Cabinet report from February, which did not include any assessment of risk associated with reduced collections if R&B went into 2020. The £159k savings that had been identified were based on CIPFA guidance that 20% of staff costs could be saved, but could Members be assured that this would not affect collection rates. He highlighted that CBC's current collection rate was 98% compared to the national average of 97% and questioned how a 20% cut in staff would not have a negative impact on collection rates. Based on the £45m received annually by this council, a 1% decrease represented £450k which in his view illustrated the scale of the risk of the potential loss. He also had concerns about accountability, given that the three other partners had nominated Officers to the Board, whereas this Council had nominated an elected Member. Councillors were elected and were therefore politically accountable to residents, Officers were not and it was for these reasons that he would support the recommendations.

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services assured Members of the Overview and that Scrutiny Committee that he had revisited the decision not to include the two services but that ultimately Cabinet's decision had remained unchanged. Resilience was something that would be addressed by adopting a holistic approach to extending the services across Cheltenham. Members had cited Ubico as an example of a shared front-facing service, but waste was an area which benefitted greatly from economies of scale and Members were reminded that Customer Services for Ubico had remained within CBC. He did not mean to suggest that revenues and benefits would cease to operate from Cheltenham if it moved into 2020 instead, what would change would be the management of the service. In relation to new technology, ICT, which was already part of a shared service, would be merged with West Oxfordshire and Cotswolds, which would provide a platform across the 4 authorities and therefore Cheltenham would benefit from improved technology, starting with telephony. In closing, he stated that this decision was about more than money, it was about the type of administration and the nature of the council that he was part of.

Upon a vote it was  
Voting (For 27 with 7 abstentions)

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. The continued designation of Paul Jones as s151 Officer in an interim seconded capacity until 27 March 2017 be approved and the inclusion of the management of revenues and benefits from the date of withdrawal from the 2020 Joint Committee be noted.**
- 2. The Leader of the Council be appointed as this Council's Member representative of the support services company.**

**11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Harman, introduced the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2015-16. Firstly, he thanked Saira Malin, the Democracy Officer who supported the committee, as well as those that had been involved in any of the task groups and the lead Members, Councillors Payne and Walklett, for their contributions and hard work over the last year. The report summarised some of the successes of the previous year, which had involved holding Cabinet to account, as well as a number of presentations on topics that were important to Cheltenham residents, which had included the NHS and the Police and Crime Commissioner and Cheltenham Festivals were scheduled to attend an upcoming meeting. He reminded all Members that they could put forward items for consideration for inclusion on the committee work plan and were welcome at meetings. As had been agreed earlier in the meeting, Stagecoach would attend a future meeting of the committee and he noted that he would be minded to use his discretion to allow non-committee Members to ask questions, were they to attend.

Councillor Sudbury raised the issue of the Urban Gull Forum, which was currently supported by the Team Leader for Participation and Engagement, but which she hoped could be adopted as a standing task group. Councillor Harman, who was also a member of the Forum, confirmed that they were scheduled to meet on the 1 November and that he planned to suggest that a formal report be tabled with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in November. It would then be for the committee to consider if and how it wanted to scrutinise the topic.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment took the opportunity to highlight the work of Cabinet Member Working Groups, which he personally felt, provided a level of scrutiny.

Members thanked the committee for the work that they conducted, given the limited resources available to them.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

**RESOLVED that the Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny 2015-16 be noted.**

**12. AUDIT COMMITTEE UPDATE**

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Councillor Colin Hay had asked for this item to be tabled on the agenda. Since authority to agree and sign the accounts had been delegated to the Audit Committee and Chairman of the Audit Committee respectively, reporting to Council had ceased. However, Councillor Hay felt that it was important that all members be made aware that the accounts had been audited, with Grant Thornton, the external auditors having recorded their appreciation for the assistance provided by the finance team and other staff. Whilst some issues were identified, which was not uncommon, there were no material issues, which had long been the case and he felt that officers should be congratulated for their hard work. In terms of the Value for Money, three areas were assessed: decision making, sustainability and partnership working and two interlinked risks were identified: the MTFS and 2020 Vision. Grant Thornton were confident that the risks were adequately mitigated by past experience of this council finding alternatives. ICT controls needed to be reviewed, but again, Grant Thornton were confident that this could be achieved.

He also took the opportunity to report that, following a review of the future provision of Internal Audit, proposals from both Audit Cotswolds, the councils existing provider, and the South West Audit Partnership (provider to Forest of Dean, West Oxfordshire and Cotswolds) had been assessed. The bids had been assessed using a price/quality score of 40%/60% and the South West Audit Partnership had been successful, meaning the same amount of work would be delivered for less money, by a larger group, which included a more extensive skill set. He did note that the draft minute of this item would be amended, following concerns raised by officers of Audit Cotswolds that they read as if Audit Cotswolds had not been successful because of resilience and a weaker governance model.

Members were advised that the Whistle-Blowing Policy had been reviewed so that it was aligned with partners.

A Member agreed that officers should be commended for their effort and hard work in producing the annual accounts.

There were no resolutions arising from this item.

### **13. NOTICES OF MOTION**

#### **Motion 1 – Changes to State Pensions**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Clucas, seconded by Councillor Parsons:

*"This Council recognises the hardship that is being caused by gender and age related changes to State Pensions and calls upon the Government to make fair transitional state pension arrangements for all women born on or after 6th April 1951, who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age (SPA) with lack of appropriate notification."*

In proposing the motion, Councillor Clucas highlighted that this was an important issue affecting many women who for various reasons did not manage 40 years of contributions. The motion was asking government to look again at

this issue and the same request had been made by many other councils. In the previous week, 197 petitions had been presented at the House of Commons.

She referred to the amendment which had been circulated by Councillor Babbage and seconded by Councillor Savage. She indicated that she would be happy to accept the amendment provided it made reference to the other parties that have made similar representations and the 197 petitions. The additional wording would then read

*“This Council supports the work done by Cheltenham's MP Alex Chalk together with MPs from all parties in presenting 149 petitions signed by local residents calling for fairer transitional pension arrangements and debating the issue in Parliament.*

*This Council also welcomes the formation of the new All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the State Pension Age of which Alex Chalk MP was a founding member.”*

As Councillor Babbage was happy to accept the revised wording, this became the substantive motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Parsons said that it was an issue of great concern to many women and it was a matter of fairness and justice.

In the short debate that followed Members agreed that many women were suffering financial hardship and had lost out because of their date of birth and Members were happy to support the motion. A Member encouraged other members to sign the online petition if they had not already done so.

Councillor Clucas thanked Members for their support and hoped that Council's resolution would be passed to government so that the authority could be seen as one supporting fairness in pensions and encouraging to young people.

**Upon a vote the motion was CARRIED unanimously**

## **Motion 2 – Preventing Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Willingham, seconded by Councillor Sudbury:

*“Cheltenham Borough Council notes the important and valuable work performed by the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) across the County.*

*This Council is concerned that whilst many areas of Domestic Abuse are addressed by primary legislation, have well-defined best practice to try to prevent them and have support services that can provide assistance to victims; the victims of Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse can be left with little redress against their abuser, can experience poverty and can become secondary victims of the debt collection industry, and that there is currently little guidance and best practice for lenders and financial services providers about the necessary checks and balances to incorporate into their lending and debt*

*recovery procedures to avoid facilitating or exacerbating Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse.*

*This Council notes that it has limited powers to act directly to address Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse, but calls upon the Leader of the Council, or his delegated Cabinet Member, to ensure that the matter is raised with the Local Government Association both to raise the profile of this issue and to lobby the government to introduce primary legislation to require lenders, financial services providers and the debt recovery industry to put safeguards in place to try to minimise the occurrence of Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse, and to investigate what measures can be put in place to reduce the impact of Coerced Debt on the victims of Financial Abuse.*

*However, in areas such as Housing, Council Tax, Benefits and staff training, which locally are in the control or influence of this Council; Cheltenham Borough Council resolves to work with partners including, but not limited to, GDASS and CAB, to explore how measures can be incorporated into Council processes and procedures to minimise the risk of Coerced Debt and Financial Abuse occurring in our interactions with the people of Cheltenham, and to seek to develop and implement a "best practice" policy."*

In proposing the motion, Councillor Willingham gave examples of situations he had come across which had brought home to him the true nature and significance of the problems people experienced. It was important to raise the awareness of this important issue and he would like the council to aim to be a beacon authority in raising this issue and putting steps in place to address it

A Member highlighted that this was a very important issue which often fell below the radar and whilst welcoming the legislative changes it also required a change in culture to be dealt with effectively. They suggested a pre Council Seminar by GDAS could be arranged to raise Members awareness of the issue and this suggestion was supported by other Members.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Sudbury spoke of her personal experiences and how it was a strange thing to live through which many people are not prepared for. She felt it was more important to listen to people's experiences rather than expert opinion which could be seen as patronising and stereotypical. It was a very complex issue but patterns of behaviour in victims can be spotted and help given at the appropriate time.

In his summing up, Councillor Willingham thanked Members for their support and indicated that he could provide contacts who could deliver a Member Seminar.

**Upon a vote the motion was CARRIED unanimously.**

### **Motion 3 – Oakley Resource Centre**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Colin Hay and seconded by Councillor Wilkinson:

*"This council notes the decision of Oakley Neighbourhood Project and Oakley Regeneration Partnership to close due to the current finances being*



*unsustainable. It further notes the substantial benefit to residents the project has had in the ward, which has some of the highest indices of deprivation not only in Cheltenham but the whole County. The loss of services, provided by the project, will have a significant negative effect on the local community, which will almost certainly create greater demand on statutory services.*

*Therefore, this Council - which is most closely associated with the project, should call a meeting of the statutory bodies, CCG, the County Council, the Police, Cheltenham Borough Homes and other relevant organisations with an interest in the local area to identify what services are required and how best to deliver them. That this meeting is called with some urgency to ensure residents have some continuity. That council also ensures that local councillors are fully involved in the discussions”.*

In proposing the motion, Councillor Hay gave some background to the issue which had led the trustees to take the view that the Neighbourhood Project and the Partnership were unsustainable as a project. His primary concern as a ward Councillor was for his residents who relied on the current services that were provided by the partnership and were a vital level of support in this deprived area of the town. Cheltenham Borough Council was the lead authority and owned the building but it needed the other statutory bodies to come together and find a solution. Whilst this could take several months, it was important to find a way to continue to deliver these vital services in the meantime. He read out several quotes from letters he had received from local residents who had benefited from those services which included food banks and help in education and finding jobs.

One Member speaking as a past Mayor, supported the motion as during their Mayoral year he had the opportunity to see what vital support to their communities these organisations could provide. Without this support there could be a cost to the council in real terms for dealing with such issues as homelessness and increased levels of crime and antisocial behaviour.

Another Member praised by Councillors Colin and Rowena Hay for their work in their ward which was one of the most deprived areas in the town and fully supported the proposals.

The Mayor added her support for the motion and praised all the volunteers in the town who helped at these community centres and Cheltenham was so fortunate to have them.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles advised that the council had been meeting regularly with the trustees over the last few months. The council and other parties currently provided £200 K pa of financial support and so there was the opportunity to use this funding in other ways to keep services going. Discussions were already under way to relocate the food bank. She highlighted that until the partnership surrendered the lease on the building, the council had no control over the use of the building. This was hoped to be completed next week and a meeting was planned in mid-November with partners and she would be happy to supply further updates to members.

Councillor Hay was disappointed that partners had not been brought together earlier to address the issue and put a solution in place before it reached the point where the trustees felt they had to take the decision to close. Although he acknowledged the position with the lease, he still felt it was possible to have open discussions with partners now, ahead of the surrender. He was pleased with the assurances given by the Cabinet Member that her aim was to continue to provide as many services as possible but it was a shame that more detailed work could not have been done ahead of time and he hoped this would be a learning point for the future.

The Mayor added her support for the work that the ward Members for Oakley were doing.

**Upon a vote the motion was CARRIED unanimously.**

**14. ANY OTHER ITEM THE MAYOR DETERMINES AS URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION**

There were no urgent items requiring a decision.

Chris Ryder  
**Chairman**