

Cabinet

Tuesday, 12th December, 2017
6.00 - 6.25 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles), Chris Coleman (Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment), Peter Jeffries (Cabinet Member Housing), Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Development and Safety) and Roger Whyborn (Cabinet Member Corporate Services)
Also in attendance:	Councillor Tim Harman

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Rowena Hay

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December would be considered at the January 2018 meeting of Cabinet.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

1.	Question from Fiona Wild to the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman
	Has the enormous response of 2,436 signatures, gathered in only 3 weeks, on the petition to retain the current style of planting in keeping with the surrounding formal buildings, in Imperial Gardens & the Long Gardens, been fully taken into account by the Cabinet to influence their final decision on the future appearance of these areas?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>In response to the petition and the council debate, I requested that officers further consider options for the 2 locations which raised public concern.</p> <p>The business case considering all options including a new option to retain the current planting regime in the Long Gardens and Imperial Gardens and move to perennial planting in all other locations was considered by the council's overview and scrutiny committee on 27th November 2017. Members of overview and scrutiny committee were supportive of this new option (option 2); the recommendation to be considered by the Cabinet tonight.</p>

	<p>In a supplementary question Fiona Wild said that whilst she was relieved that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recommended that Cabinet adopt Option 2 in response to the petition consisting of nearly 2,500 signatures gathered in only 3 weeks, she asked whether Cabinet knew of any reason why the Gold Award for environmental responsibility and community participation, won by Imperial Gardens in the Autumn from the Heart of England Tourism Authority, received no publicity whatsoever?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment confirmed that he had not been aware of the award and assured Mrs Wild that he would correct this.</p>
2.	Question from Fiona Wild to the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman
	<p>Has the possibility that visitors may be less encouraged to return to the town if herbaceous or wild planting lacks colour or looks untidy in the winter, been properly considered by members of this Cabinet in the light of the detrimental effect this might have on the local economy?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Any changes to planting style would take into account the local setting. A herbaceous or perennial scheme in the Long gardens and Imperial Gardens is likely to have been formal and there were no plans for wild planting.</p> <p>With careful choice of perennial plants and bulbs winter and spring schemes can be just as colourful and tidy as annual bedding.</p> <p>I do not believe there to be any evidence to suggest that a change in planting style is likely to impact on the local economy.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Fiona Wild asked whether Cabinet would be prepared to accept that there may be a negative effect upon the local economy if the formal and colourful bedding plants in Imperial and the Long Gardens, beloved of visitors and most residents, were to be replaced by herbaceous planting, which although pleasing to connoisseurs and followers of trends, looked dull out of season, although actual evidence of any future downturn was, of course, impossible to quantify at present?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member referred Mrs Wild to recommendation 2 of the report which stated that further work and consultation would be undertaken in respect of the Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens. He stated that if following this work there was evidence that perennial planting would cause a detrimental effect the council would act accordingly and stressed that the very best interests of Cheltenham were at the heart of every decision the council made.</p>

5. PUBLIC REALM PLANTING STRATEGY REVIEW

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment introduced the report which outlined proposals to adopt an alternative planting strategy for

Cheltenham's public realm. The report considered the business case for the change in approach which compared three options for the council's future planting strategy. Each option assessed the community, economic, environmental, legal, HR and technological implications. A detailed financial assessment of each option was also provided. He was grateful to the petition which had been debated in council in October and which had led to further work being undertaken on the options. He also made reference to the petition submitted in favour of the proposals. He therefore recognised the importance of the planting regime to people in the borough.

He went on to explain that in bringing forward the proposals the council had considered the aspirations of the town centre going forward and the future of the council's nursery. He stressed however that it was not all about money but the life and times of the town, informed by public debate. He believed the recommendations were sensible and if adopted they would enable the change of planting regime in some parks and gardens with sustainable planting in a more structured and planned manner. The existing regime in Imperial Gardens and the Long Garden would be retained with further work and consultation proposed in respect of those Gardens. He stated that at the proposals were right for Cheltenham at this time. The financial implications were however clear and there were reasons for further work but with the caveat of more consultation. The council was committed to listen going forward and recognising the strong feelings of the public.

The Leader added that the public debate had been interesting and useful. He highlighted that the council used to enter the Britain in Bloom competition but no longer entered as it did not have sufficient sustainable planting to qualify.

In response to a question on whether it would be reasonable within the limitations to plant roses in places in the Long Gardens or other forms of brightly flowering perennials the Cabinet Member said that initial advice would be sought from experts within the spirit of the decision. The council did however have to be careful when handling sensitive areas.

Finally, the Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment wished to put on record his thanks to those officers involved in preparing the report on the planting regime and responses prepared for Overview and Scrutiny and the Council debate.

RESOLVED THAT

- 1. Option 2 be approved, i.e retain seasonal bedding in the Long Garden and Imperial Gardens, change to perennial planting in all other locations over a phased period of 3 years.**
- 2. Further work and consultation be undertaken in respect of the Imperial Gardens and the Long Gardens.**

6. PROPERTY PORTFOLIO ASSET REVIEW

In the absence of the Cabinet Member Finance the Leader introduced the report which recommended a strategy for the asset portfolio and the specific

recommendations for each of the properties as set out in the asset review.

He explained that many Councils were facing a tough and complex set of pressures – funding cuts, rising demand for services with increased costs associated with its provision and economic growth challenges. Further spending cuts were inevitable and likely to be in the next two months with the Local Government settlement and the decision on the new homes bonus.

Demographic and economic pressures on authorities and their services were increasing so the question was how could local authorities transform themselves to respond to the pressures they faced. The current thinking of Government was to make councils become less reliant on Revenue Support Grant and other centrally controlled grant funding. It was therefore this Cabinet's aspiration to become financially sustainable by 2021-2022. This was one of the reasons why the Cabinet Member Finance had requested the Chief Finance Officer to write a commercial strategy for which she was seeking Cabinet approval.

Many councils were facing an increasing need for reinvestment in resources and services, ranging from community cohesion, health and social care to education and infrastructure. The status quo would only lead to service reduction. Councils would need to have a relentless focus on generating additional sources of revenue income as government grant continued to fall and interest rates remained low. The Leader said that the Cabinet Member believed that the focus, where market conditions allowed, should be on areas such as investments in the commercial property portfolio and regeneration through both direct and indirect investment to boost local economic activity.

The Leader then addressed the issue of risk stating that risk was not the same as uncertainty. Risk was a logical probability function whereas uncertainty was anything but. He said that those councils who adopted a more commercial approach would need to identify assumptions and risks. The risks associated with the proposed acquisition had been identified and scored appropriately but the Cabinet Member Finance had questioned what the alternative to those risks would be which would in essence be cuts to services the public relied on. The Chief Finance Officer had also questioned whether the council could afford not to take the risks of commercial decisions.

In conclusion the Leader believed that commercialisation was the route to maintain and enhance service delivery. An appetite for risk was therefore needed whilst understanding and assessing those risks. Diversification and due diligence would be key to success.

Finally the Leader highlighted that whilst the council would maximise the use of its assets there were other things it could do.

RESOLVED THAT

The recommended strategy for the asset portfolio and the specific recommendations for each of the properties, as set out in the asset review be approved, subject to the completion of the relevant option appraisals and subsequent appropriate approval process.

7. GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL-INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018/19 FOR CONSULTATION

On behalf of the Cabinet Member Finance the Leader introduced the report which set out the Cabinet's interim budget proposals for 2018/19 for consultation. He said that the Cabinet was conscious of the impact of a potential council tax rise but equally conscious of the cost of services. He wished to put on record his thanks to the Chief Finance Officer and his team and all officers across the council. Consultation on the budget proposals would run until 19 January 2018.

The Leader referred to paragraph 4.13 of the MTFS in appendix 3 and reported that a piece of work had been commissioned to obtain analysis from the actuary to explore the cash flow benefit to the council in making the required secondary sum payments to the Local Government Pension Scheme as a pre-payment for future year liability i.e. pay some of the liability up front which impacts on cash flow but does not represent an additional budgetary commitment. Currently monthly contributions were paid to the pension fund, however, if a prepayment of £7.473 million was made, it was anticipated that savings of £100k per annum could be realised over the final two years of the three year actuarial cycle.

He announced that the findings from this analysis have indicated that the savings were double that proposed and equated to a discount of nearly £400k (£200k per annum). In simple terms this translated into a 5.2% return which was significantly more than what was being earned on current investments.

RESOLVED THAT

- 1. the interim budget proposals be approved for consultation including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council of £202.12 for the year 2018/19 (an increase of 2.54% or £5.00 a year for a Band D property).**
- 2. the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Commercial Strategy outlined in section 3 and Appendix 3 be approved.**
- 3. the growth proposals, including one off initiatives at Appendix 4, be approved for consultation.**
- 4. the proposed capital programme at Appendix 6, as outlined in Section 6 be approved.**
- 5. authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for consultation.**
- 6. consultation responses be sought by 19th January 2018.**

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT REVENUE AND CAPITAL-REVISED BUDGET 2017/18 AND INTERIM BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018/19 FOR CONSULTATION

The Leader introduced the report which summarised the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revised forecast for 2017/18 and the Cabinet's interim budget proposals for 2018/19 for consultation. He highlighted that whilst the Government policy to reduce rents had been beneficial for tenants it had the effect of reducing the budget the council was able to provide as a consequence. However CBH had continued to make substantial progress in plans to modernise and transform the housing management and maintenance services delivered to tenants which was welcomed. The Leader informed Members that the consultation would run until 31 January 2018.

The Cabinet Member Housing paid tribute to the work CBH had undertaken in managing the Government's rent policy in a comparably short time frame. He thanked CBH on behalf of residents in the town.

A Member remarked that there were unseen consequences of the rent policy in terms of housing associations withdrawing from developments as the funding packages were no longer there with developers relying on housing association funding up front. Having now adopted the JCS framework there would now be more control over developments taking place.

RESOLVED THAT

- 1. the revised HRA forecast for 2017/18 be noted.**
- 2. the interim HRA budget proposals for 2018/19 (shown at Appendix 2) be approved for consultation including a proposed rent decrease of 1% and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within the report.**
- 3. the proposed HRA capital programme for 2018/19 as shown at Appendix 3 be approved.**
- 4. authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to determine and approve any additional material that may be needed to support the presentation of the interim budget proposals for consultation.**
- 5. consultation responses be sought by 31st January 2018.**

9. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment informed Members that since the introduction of the new recycling service there had been a 25% increase in recycling which showed that residents were keen to recycle and it was easy to do so. There were bound to be teething problems with 80 % collection day changes and the introduction of new recycling vehicles and new rounds. He asked residents to report any misfunctions in the service so that problems could be identified.

The Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment explained that plans for the cemetery and crematorium were on track and the access route was nearly complete with work starting on site at the turn of the new year. He would continue to update Members as the project progressed.

Chairman

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