

Cabinet

**Tuesday, 9th November, 2021
6.00 - 6.40 pm**

Attendees	
Councillors:	Rowena Hay (Leader of the Council), Peter Jeffries (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Finance & Assets), Victoria Atherstone (Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing & Business), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Safety & Communities), Mike Collins (Cabinet Member Housing), Iain Dobie (Cabinet Member Waste & Recycling & Street Services), Martin Horwood (Cabinet Member Customer & Regulatory Services), Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Cyber & Strategic Transport) and Max Wilkinson (Cabinet Member Climate Emergency)
Also in attendance:	Gareth Edmundson, Gemma Bell, Emma Cathcart, Howard Norris and Steve Slater

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

as the chair of the Big Local, which had a relationship with Cheltenham Borough Homes.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The public minutes of the 12th October meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

5. MATTER FROM 18TH OCTOBER COUNCIL - SAFETY OF WOMEN AT NIGHT

The Leader noted that the request from Council on 18th October regarding the 'Safety of Women at Night' report depended on the outcome of the bid, which they hoped to find out in mid-November. If unsuccessful, Cabinet was asked to take forward a number of proposals to support the safety of women in the town, including working with colleagues at Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucester City Council, whose applications to previous rounds of the Safer Streets Fund had already been accepted.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities clarified that the report was not a decision-making one, but rather a briefing for members in response to concerns

expressed about the safety of women in the town. She praised officers' work on this as being of the highest quality. The report looked at various possible solutions, which included training door staff to spot and respond to signs of drink spiking.

6. USE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INVESTIGATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Leader presented the report, noting that the policy was a living document and as such needed reviewing from time to time.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Policy attached to this report be formally adopted;
2. The Chief Executive be authorised to approve future minor amendments to the Policy in consultation with the Counter Fraud Unit Manager, One Legal and the Leader of the Council.

7. CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY REVIEW

The Leader presented the report, noting that the authority was obligated to review its policy on a regular basis. It was important that the policy be flexible and able to adapt to different circumstances.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The updated Corporate Health and Safety Policy be approved.

8. STRATEGIC HOUSING REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT: STRONGER WORKING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Member Housing presented the report, which updated members on the Stronger Working Partnership Programme with Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH). He highlighted a number of key points, in particular the impact of Covid-19 on services and residents. The council had been recognised both locally and nationally for its pandemic response, and now needed to ensure it was in the best possible position to lead the post Covid-19 recovery as set out in the council's Recovery Strategy.

As part of this, the council had commissioned an independent strategic review by Campbell Tickell to assess the value and sustainability of delivering housing services under the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) model. The review recommended that the council retain CBH as its housing delivery provider and review opportunities to further strength this partnership to reduce areas of duplication, enable strategic and operational alignment and ensure value for money.

The council had set out ambitious plans for housing in the borough for the benefit of customers, residents and communities. These were set out in the Corporate Strategy and summarised in the Housing Outcomes Framework, and

would take significant investment, resource and focus to deliver. The key ambitions were to increase the supply of new homes and affordable housing through a £180m housing investment programme in partnership with CBH, making the council and borough carbon neutral by 2030, and providing well-run and efficient services to residents and communities.

He drew particular attention to sections 3 and 7 of the report, which covered the joint outcomes which CBC and CBH were aiming for, and asked members to endorse the recommendations in the report, which included an update on progress by March 2022.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency thanked the Cabinet Member Housing and CBH for the report. It was an important step in the partnership between CBC and CBH, and praised the focus on carbon neutrality and affordable housing. He noted that 320 Swindon Road, the council's first carbon neutral council houses, were in motion.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities thanked Steve Slater, Chief Executive of CBH, for his organisation's active support of the Big Local.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member and officers involved for their work on the topic. She praised the focus on residents' needs and looked forward to the update report in March.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The progress made on the recommendations from the Strategic Housing Review Cabinet Report from January 2021 be noted;
2. A further progress report be received by March 2022.

9. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME FOR 2022/23

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets presented the report, noting that the council had been required to set a scheme for working-age residents every year since 2013. Funding for the scheme had been cut over the years and rolled into Revenue Support Grant, against a general background of local government funding reductions, but the council continued to provide the same level of support to residents despite this.

In 2019/20, a new scheme was approved with the main aim being to ensure that the most vulnerable and lowest income residents continued to receive the same support. The scheme was based on five income bands, outlined in the report. Due to the pandemic, the caseload for working-age people increased significantly, with a 25% rise by April 2021. Until March, there were 3,984 recipients with a sum cost of £3.3m, which rose to 4,988 recipients at a cost of £4.7m. Despite this increase in residents requiring assistance, the council continued to provide 100% support for those in the lowest income brackets.

During 2020/21, the income bands were increased so residents benefitting from the £20 Universal Credit uplift were not penalised. These bands will remain at the higher level in 2022/23. Many people were still recovering financially from the pandemic, and this would help them out over the next few years. He thanked officers in the Revenues & Benefits team and asked that Cabinet endorse the recommendations in the report.

The Cabinet Member Cyber and Strategic Transport added that this was one of the most important reports that Cabinet considered every year, as the council could make a genuine difference to the most vulnerable residents. The key change this year was that minor changes in income would not affect what a low-paid resident would receive, which would prevent entitlements being unnecessarily disrupted. The Leader agreed with this and praised the focus on aiding the most vulnerable residents.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The outcome of the consultation on the Local Council Tax Support scheme in Appendix 4 be noted;
2. The council tax support scheme for working age customers in Appendix 2 and summarised in Appendix 3 be approved as the preferred option for 2022/23;
3. Cabinet recommend that Council approves the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for working age customers for 2022/23;
4. Cabinet recommend that Council gives authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Assets in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets to uprate income levels in line with any increase in Welfare Benefits by 21 February 2022, if required.

10. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency reported that he had begun a mini-tour of Cheltenham schools with Planet Cheltenham. He had visited All Saints and would be going to Warden Hill soon. It was good to see Year 10 students engaged in environment work related to COP26 and Cheltenham Zero.

The Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business congratulated the Lido Trust on their award of 'Best Sporting Venue' at the SoGlos awards. She added that the ice rink was starting to take shape, and that residents might have noticed different breeds of cattle up Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common along the Cotswold Way.

11. BUDGET STRATEGY AND PROCESS 2022/23

The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets presented the report, noting that it was an urgent item due to administrative error, having not been on the forward plan for requisite 28 days.

At the last Council meeting, he had presented the budget forecast for the next year, which predicted a significant overspend. Changes in working environments post-pandemic meant that the council needed to rethink how it funded its priorities, and the 2022 budget offered an opportunity to reset and refocus.

He noted that the Chancellor's Autumn Budget had allocated an additional £1.5bn for local government, although there was no indication of a Fair Funding Review for local authorities and no changes to business rates. They could expect specific details of how this would impact the council in December, but in the meantime the budget would be supported by commercial revenue. He noted that the council faced ongoing pressures which were primarily pandemic-related, and thanked the finance team for their hard work behind the scenes.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency reflected on the difficulties caused by the late announcement of government funding, which diminished their ability to plan properly for the future. The Cabinet Member Finance and Assets agreed that this had got worse over the years and put significant pressure on officers. The Leader echoed this.

The Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services noted a possible error in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 relating to the financial years listed. The Head of Finance was happy to correct this and circulate an updated report.

The Cabinet Member Housing noted the importance of the Housing Revenue Account, and emphasised his willingness to do what he could to help with this.

The Leader moved to the vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The budget setting timetable at Appendix 2 be approved;
2. The outline budget strategy outlined in section 4 be approved;
3. The pressures in addition to the £1.044m overspend reported in the August 2021 budget monitor and the large amount of work which will be required to close this gap be noted;
4. The intention for this Council to remain in the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool in 2022/23 as outlined in section 5 be noted;
5. Suggestions from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group be considered by the Section 151 Officer, Deputy Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets in preparing the interim budget proposals for 2022/23.

12. EXEMPT MINUTES

Members resolved to move into exempt session.

The exempt minutes of the 12th October meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

Chairman