

Council

Monday, 6th December, 2021
2.30 - 4.20 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Harvey (Chair), Sandra Holliday (Vice-Chair), Victoria Atherstone, Matt Babbage, Dilys Barrell, Ian Bassett-Smith, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Rowena Hay, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Chris Mason, Guy Maughfling, Andrew McKinlay, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Louis Savage, Diggory Seacome, Jo Stafford, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

Minutes

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Baker, Barnes, Brownsteen, Hegenbarth and McCloskey

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING RESOLVED THAT**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. **COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR**

The Mayor paid tribute to Susie Starling, former Councillor for the Lansdown ward, who had recently passed away.

As important recognition of the Srebrenica genocide he invited Members to take a memorial stone.

He wished to put on record his thanks to Members, officers and volunteers who had prepared Christmas gift bags for children living in poverty in the town as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative. He informed that the NCLB awards would take place in January for which he had been involved in shortlisting.

Finally, he wished to thank all Members and Officers who had assisted him as Chair of Council and Mayor this year. He gave particular thanks in advance to all those who would be working over the Christmas workers as essential workers, or on call.

5. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader reported that a CBC and CBH joint venture called Vivid Living had delivered the first thirteen properties for the private sector rental market as part of the councils commitment to invest £180 million in new homes which included the private rented sector market place.

In the context of the declared climate emergency, the Leader informed that the Cabinet has decided to switch its environmental fleet away from traditional oil-based diesel to biodiesel - certified palm oil free hydro treated vegetable oil. Switching to biodiesel should reduce associated CO2 emissions by up to 90%. She added that electric charging points had already been installed at the council's depot for lighter vehicles and two electric vans would replace diesel within the next couple of months. Emerging options for heavier vehicles were under constant review on the journey towards carbon neutrality.

As part of the Town of Sanctuary initiative to support people desperately fleeing Afghanistan it was anticipated that approximately 10 households would be provided with accommodation within the borough.

The Leader referred to the recent concerns expressed by councillor colleagues on behalf of residents relating to the current pressures within the NHS and care sector. She informed that as part of her wider role on the network of South West Councils, District Council's and the LGA she had given her full support to a joint letter from the region setting out collective concerns to the Secretary of State on the pressures within the Health and Care services. In addition, she reported that the Chief Executive had also been engaging with senior civil servants and had relayed the concerns of members of this Council, this includes highlighting the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting which was attended by Gloucestershire's NHS Trust. She wished to put on record her thanks to the senior representatives of the health service for attending that meeting and for providing members with detailed responses to their questions.

One key message she wished to highlight was the scale of the challenge that our current health and care sector faced as we moved further into what is likely to be an extremely challenging winter.

She referred to a recent study illustrating that the NHS and Care sector was facing over a quarter of a million vacancies at a time when they were needed most.

Recognising that Covid represented an added pressure, the situation was unsustainable and a much more fundamental review of our health and care services was required, including better investment, and pay, if we are to genuinely tackle the problem.

Finally, the Leader expressed her thanks to all CBC staff and our partners, in particular the UBICO teams who will be working over Christmas, and those staff who will be on duty in case of emergencies.

6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS

There were none.

7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

8. MEMBER QUESTIONS

1.	Question from Councillor John Payne to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	The council's decision to fund the provision of the ice rink on Imperial Gardens as part of an initiative to encourage increased footfall over the Christmas period is welcome but with reservations. The ice rink is being powered by one of two very large diesel generators. How does the Cabinet Member justify one of the most polluting sources of energy generation in the centre of a town that has declared a climate emergency?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for the question Cllr Payne. The use of a diesel generator as the main power source of the ice rink is an unavoidable consequence of there being an insufficient supply of mains electrical power to Imperial Gardens to maintain the rink. This is not a new scenario however and frequently necessitates the use of ancillary power units/generators in Imperial Gardens for many of the larger events and festivals that take place here (as is also the case in Montpellier Gardens).</p> <p>The need for upgraded infrastructure at these sites– and others in Cheltenham – coupled with new innovations in energy sources and fuel types was identified in the Council's interim Events Strategy (published last year). This is currently being actively explored therefore with potential solutions being identified as part of our climate change agenda and a more sustainable approach to events in the town.</p> <p>Over the 6 weeks of the ice rink's operation, we expect to welcome upwards of 30,000 skaters to enjoy this event in Cheltenham (with the additional spend within the town centre as a consequence). Whilst we cannot suggest of course that each and every one of these would have travelled elsewhere to enjoy the distinctive festive experience of a Christmas ice rink (Gloucester or Malvern being the closest), had Cheltenham's ice rink not gone ahead, it is not unreasonable to assume that a proportion of this number will have made a far longer journey to visit one of these other rinks with the consequent emissions and impact from these journeys.</p>
	Supplementary question
	There does not appear to have been any impact assessment of the generators, which have high diesel consumption. Will this be addressed, and when will the results be available?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	I am working closely with the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency on this, including a meeting last week on the events strategy which highlighted the importance of addressing the impact of generators and seeking suitable alternatives like biofuel. The new events strategy will align with the new culture strategy, which is due in early 2022. I agree that we need to move away from using diesel generators.
2.	Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	Can the Cabinet Member justify the generators for the Imperial Square Ice Rink, given that they are run on diesel fuel, and also given that they are producing a permanent hum which is preventing residents in the Square from sleeping?

	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for the question Cllr Seacome. In line with the earlier response to Cllr Payne, due to their being an insufficient supply of mains electrical power to Imperial Gardens, as with many temporary events that take place in our town centre parks and which are enjoyed by so many all year round, the use of a diesel generator is currently the only way of providing sufficient power to such events on these sites. The use of a generator was set out in the planning application which received unanimous approval at the Planning Committee on 14 October 2021.</p> <p>The low frequency resonance from the generator is the subject of targeted and ongoing mitigation actions in line with advice from a specialist acoustic consultant and our Council Environmental Health colleagues. A number of incremental steps continue to be taken on-site alongside the ice rink operator, with demonstrable improvements to this low frequency issue already having been implemented. Additional measures and testing is underway and all parties are committed to resolving the situation as swiftly and effectively as possible.</p>
	Supplementary question
	The rink has been up for two and a half weeks now, and the noise pollution is still significant. How is this being addressed?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	We are looking at 6 different potential measures to reduce the noise and vibrations, some of which have already been implemented, resulting in an 11-decibel reduction. The noise levels were assessed by acoustic engineers before the ice rink was up and they confirmed that these generators would have a relatively low impact. An alternative generator is being looked at, as is potentially relocating one of the generators to reduce its impact.
3.	Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	At a recent O&S Committee meeting the Head of Planning confirmed that residents were important stakeholders when considering a planning application and that no other stakeholder carried more sway. With regard to the Ice Rink's planning application does the cabinet member agree that the acoustic report was flawed? If so, how could the committee fairly consider the application from the residents' viewpoint?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you Councillor Mason, you are correct that residents are important stakeholders in the planning process.</p> <p>The commissioning of an acoustic report was a condition of the Planning Committee's approval. In line with this condition, the report was commissioned and completed prior to the installation of the generator. The consultant's submitted report was formulated in accordance with the relevant BS 4142 (British Standard) with valid data and mitigation measures identified. The report and noise impact assessment concluded that the running of the generator would result in a conclusion of low impact. Upon approval by both Environmental Health and Planning, this condition was therefore discharged.</p> <p>Since operation of the ice rink has commenced, the council has been engaged with</p>

	<p>residents and working closely with the ice rink operator, engineers from the company supplying the generators and the acoustic consultant to find the right solution to address current concerns that relate to the existence of a very low frequency resonance emanating from the generator. A number of mitigations that have been implemented so far have significantly improved the situation and further measures are currently being implemented in line with the acoustic consultant's latest recommendations.</p> <p>Planning Committee had available to them the relevant information to assess the planning application, this included the views of residents and the detail regarding noise, section 6 of the officers report sets this out https://publicaccess.cheltenham.gov.uk/online-applications/files/252327832D282926656E84ABED99A77D/pdf/21_01856_FUL-OFFICER_REPORT-1198775.pdf. The debate at planning committee on 14th October 2021 included review of residents concerns https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/g3299/Printed%20minutes%2014th-Oct-2021%2014.30%20Planning%20Committee.pdf?T=1.</p> <p>We are continuing to work collectively to improve matters further and will continue our dialogue with yourself and Cllr Seacome to share our progress towards an acceptable resolution.</p>
	Supplementary question
	Do you accept that the wrong generators were put in place, and that they are causing harm?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	I don't accept that the wrong ones were used – they were assessed at the time and confirmed to be low impact by British standards. Since then we have learned that the placement of the generator is significant, and going forward we will take this into account in order to mitigate the impact on residents.
4.	Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	Prior to the Ice Rink's planning application a meeting was held with local residents and officers from Cheltenham BID and Marketing Cheltenham. At this meeting the residents were promised quiet generators. Given the number of complaints from residents do you agree that the Council has failed to meet this promise?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Again, thank you for your question Cllr Mason. As with the earlier response, in line with the planning condition attached to the Planning Committee's approval on 14th October 2021, the Council has sought professional advice from a specialist acoustic consultant on the use of a generator to power the ice rink. The resulting noise impact assessment advised that the generator would result in a conclusion of low impact – which is consistent with the information provided by officers at the meeting with local residents to which you refer.</p> <p>Having undertaken a further assessment following the installation and running of the generator, the presence of a particularly low frequency tonal characteristic was recorded, which has been found to be the primary cause for complaint. The Council is now acting on and implementing the acoustic consultant's recommendations in order to mitigate this issue.</p>

	Supplementary question
	Diesel generators have been a recurring issue for many years, long before the Cabinet Member's time. Residents are uncomfortable with the constant noise, and some are having to buy earplugs. The council needs to address this more proactively as it is causing harm. Will the Cabinet Member apologise to residents of Imperial Square?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Yes, I apologise to residents of Imperial Square for the issues they are facing. The problems are being addressed and we will ensure that we learn lessons from this when it comes to future events in our parks.
5.	Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	Recently Councillor Baker arranged a meeting between Park/College Ward Councillors and representatives of Bath Road traders. There was broad agreement that the condition of the Bath Road toilets was poor and that the Council should be asked both to retain the facility and to make significant improvements. Will the Cabinet Member agree to include in the budget for the 202/23 financial provision for improvements?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	The capital programme in the draft budget proposal will be available for consultation from 22 December 2021. There are currently no plans to include the Bath Road toilets in the capital programme for 2022/23. Property Services have been notified of your concerns and will be carrying out a site visit to the toilets before Christmas to determine whether any reactive repairs work is required. There was a review on the provision of public conveniences as Cllr Harman will I am sure recall, this was a paper that was brought forward pre pandemic it is absolutely right that we revisit this paper across all of the facilities and I will keep members informed.
	Supplementary question
	It is a shame that we can't include something in the forthcoming Cabinet program. Can the Cabinet Member let me know the outcome of his upcoming visit, as it is an important asset? The British Toilet Association cites access to clean, hygienic toilets is important to public wellbeing, and this is a busy area. Will he take this into account?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Yes, I will feed back on the results of my visit. Public toilets are a genuinely important part of my portfolio, and we must maintain and improve upon our current provision. They are not a glamorous subject but matter hugely to the town, especially for people with disabilities.
6.	Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	On 7 th December last year the Cabinet Member replied to a question from me about plans to install electric vehicle charging points into the Bath Road Car Park and others. As we approach the first anniversary of my question and his reply can he update Council on progress and possibly give target dates for installation

	Response from Cabinet Member
	As Council are aware, our focus over the last 12 months has been to support and manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Cheltenham. As we emerge from the pandemic, focus is now turning to how we can adapt to support the town's longer term economic recovery. As part of our recovery strategy, we are currently considering the installation of off-street EV charging points. In assessing potential locations we need to consider factors such as electricity provision, current car parking capacity, planning restrictions and surrounding facilities. Bath Road car park is one of 14 car parks operated by the Council which will be assessed to determine where would be the most appropriate location.
7.	Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	Could the Cabinet Member please update members on his discussions with Cheltenham's taxi drivers in relation to the implementation of the WAV policy, as discussed at Council in June?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I thank Councillor Savage for his question and welcome the opportunity it gives me to update council.</p> <p>Several meetings were held with the licensed taxi trade following the Council meeting in June. I met with the Taxi Drivers Association, operators and individual drivers twice in June, in August and most recently in November.</p> <p>Separate meetings were also had with the Cheltenham Access Forum on a number of occasions.</p> <p>During these meetings, it became clear that the deadline of 31 December 2021 for all hackney cab vehicles to become wheelchair accessible was not compatible with our ambition to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as it would require many new diesel vehicle purchases.</p> <p>It was also obvious that many drivers were genuinely facing financial difficulty in the wake of the pandemic.</p> <p>Given the imminent decisions to purchase that drivers were having to make on council advice, it then became clear that to maintain the 31 December deadline would not be right, so an urgent decision was taken by the leader and chief executive in September to lift this deadline, while I announced our ambition to move to a new policy that achieved both 100% wheelchair accessibility and net zero by 2030. I am pleased that representatives of both the Access Forum and the Cheltenham Taxi Drivers Association welcomed this announcement.</p> <p>I also want to thank the Taxi Drivers Association and the Cheltenham Access Forum for taking the time to meet with me.</p>
8.	Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on leaf-clearance efforts undertaken by CBC and its partner organisations? Specifically, residents have raised concerns in relation to uncleared pavements and potentially blocked drains in

	Beaufort Road/Oak Avenue, an area which is at risk of flooding. If plans are not in place for urgent leaf clearance in this area, can this please be prioritised?
Response from Cabinet Member	
	<p>Every year Cheltenham's leaf clearance, supporting flood alleviation, commences early autumn across the borough and concludes at the end of winter. Our prioritisation plan focuses on the areas highlighted below before moving into other residential areas. Ubico monitor the Met Office weather warnings and target known flood risk areas when appropriate. I am pleased to say that all these details are available on the Council's website, for both members and the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main routes in and out of Cheltenham • Hospital entrances and nearby pathways • Train and bus station entrances and nearby pathways • Outside schools and care homes • High footfall areas i.e. town centre, shop fronts • Areas known as high flood risks <p>I imagine you will all understand that our Ubico crews are in high demand during the Autumn and they will endeavour to clear leaf fall as efficiently as possible. I would urge the public to be patient as leaves are cleared as quickly as possible but please do report higher levels of leaf fall to customer services for prioritisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can confirm that Beaufort Road/Oak Avenue were mechanically swept week commencing 8/11/21 where access could be gained. Some parts could not be accessed due to parked cars. Manual leafing crews have been operating in the area since the beginning of October. • A Ubico supervisor checked the area on the morning of 3 December and reported back that cleansing standards were considered good with very little leafing identified and minimal detritus. The only stretch of road which required some remedial works was Charlton Court Road by the garage site (Flood Hotspot), this road channel was then scheduled for clearance on the afternoon of 3 December. • Ubico and GCC Highways have been working more closely together and have developed a more robust cleansing service in known hotspot areas. The locations where these joint deep cleansing works have taken place so far this year are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12/04/21 – Orrisdale Terrace • 13/04/21 – College Rd (Part) • 14/04/21 – Suffolk Sq • 15/04/21 – Lyefield Rd E

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200/4/21 – Montpellier Terrace (Part) • 02/06/21 – Roman Road • 09/07/21 – Naunton Lane Cycle Path • 15/07/21 – Pilley Lane & Pilley Crescent • 21/07/21 – Montpellier Spa Road • 12/08/21 – Asquith Rd & Churchill Rd • 16/09/21 – Church Road (Leck) • 19/10/21 – Upper Park St • 19/11/21 – Moorend Pk Rd (Part)
9.	Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	Could the Cabinet Member please confirm that all restrictions imposed on children's parks and play facilities owned/operated by CBC have been lifted? Specifically, can she confirm that all swings/play equipment removed in order to facilitate social distancing requirements have been reinstated?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Current government guidance (November 22 nd 2021) covering public outdoor spaces and play areas still recommends the encouragement of cleaning and hygiene therefore play area signage previously installed has been left in place to reflect this. Social distancing came to an end of July 19 th 2021, and therefore swing seats that had been removed to facilitate this have been reinstated.
	Supplementary question
	I am pleased that these have been reinstated. This question was originally submitted to the last Council meeting, when they had not, but missed the deadline. I hope that the failure of decision-makers to fully understand the impact of lockdown measures on children is not forgotten. Restricting play areas for children had a disproportionate impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Some equipment may be removed for maintenance and safety reasons now and then but to my knowledge, everything is now reopened. I would be happy to investigate further if the member can point to a particular example.
10.	Question from Councillor Richard Pineger to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	Noise pollution is a menace and a health problem for our communities. Particularly where we have high density housing like Benhall Gardens, Wasley Road, Monkscroft, beside the A40 and Cowper Road, Australia House, Hobart House and others beside PE way. I know of people in those blocks who are badly affected by the constant sound of thrashing engines, loud exhausts, and, since Cheltenham A&E closed, constant sirens from the emergency services. In addition to this, on the 27-29

	<p>October, for M5 maintenance, a constant stream of trucks with squealing brakes and honking horns ran right through the night, 3, 4, 5 am, denying our roadside residents 3 nights of sleep.</p> <p>Noise divides our communities, what options do we have as a council to work with GCC towards a reduction in road traffic noise and which other groups can we work with to deter the main polluters; motorbikes, trucks and performance-tuned cars?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>I share Cllr Pineger's concerns about noise pollution from vehicles and the health impact which this can have on those communities in closest proximity.</p> <p>We have limited powers as a district authority to deal with noise from routine traffic on existing roads. However, the powers we do have include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring suitable fenestration (windows) through the planning system for new, or amended, residential property affected by traffic noise. • Statutory nuisance powers relating to noise can include action on specific items on the street (such as heavy plant used for road works), but cannot be applied to general road traffic. • The Police can use Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles being used to cause anti-social behaviour, including through modified noisy exhausts, or loud stereo systems. They can also investigate the use of vehicle horns outside limited hours (you're not supposed to sound your horn on any 'restricted road' between the hours of 11.30pm and 7am). <p>Many of the discussions we are having with GCC, for instance through the JCS process and in relation to our air quality strategy, focus on reducing traffic levels and in particular, the most polluting vehicles, which would have the added benefit of reducing noise pollution as well.</p> <p>There is obviously the potential to add further pressure on GCC, through joint working with many organisations and community groups, including environmental organisations like Vision 21 and Clean Air Cheltenham.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question</p>
	<p>The major source of noise in the town is from road traffic. Is there anything more that CBC can do to put pressure on the highways authority to reduce this noise?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>I agree that traffic is the major source of noise pollution and that we must influence that however we can. We can work with local organisations like Clean Air Cheltenham and exert political pressure where possible. I am working closely with the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, since reducing air pollution and noise pollution go hand in hand. We will need a different attitude to mass transit from the county council before we will see genuine change.</p>
11.	<p>Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood</p>
	<p>How many planning approvals are currently outstanding which are over and above the appropriate statutory limits of 8, 10, 13 or 16 weeks? What local KPIs are in place to ensure these limits are met?</p>

	How does Cheltenham compare to similar LPAs with regards to performance, particularly on application approval times?																																
Response from Cabinet Member																																	
	<p>Councillor Nelson the data as requested is as follows for applications outside the determinations dates:</p> <p>8 weeks – 34 applications 13 weeks – 3 applications 16 weeks – 1 application which is currently subject to a non-determination appeal.</p> <p>The Planning service performance over the most recently published quarter 2021 Q2, benchmarked against neighbouring authorities, is as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Total Decisions</th> <th>% Granted</th> <th>% Determined in Time</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Cheltenham</td> <td>432</td> <td>97</td> <td>93</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gloucester</td> <td>199</td> <td>90</td> <td>92</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tewksbury</td> <td>225</td> <td>92</td> <td>72</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cotswold</td> <td>476</td> <td>97</td> <td>59</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stroud</td> <td>457</td> <td>90</td> <td>94</td> </tr> <tr> <td>South West</td> <td>13,705</td> <td>92</td> <td>86</td> </tr> <tr> <td>England</td> <td>111,705</td> <td>89</td> <td>86</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Total Decisions	% Granted	% Determined in Time	Cheltenham	432	97	93	Gloucester	199	90	92	Tewksbury	225	92	72	Cotswold	476	97	59	Stroud	457	90	94	South West	13,705	92	86	England	111,705	89	86
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	Presumably, two of the three applications outside the determination date are Newland Homes (22 homes, 4 months overdue) and Miller Homes (350 homes, more than a year overdue). To what extent have these delays, as well as the delay to the third application which I do not have details on, contributed to the drastic decline in the 5 year housing supply from 5.6 years in December 2017 to 3.7 years today? What steps are being taken to ensure we are not taken to appeal by any of these three?																																
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	Our Planning team achieve an on-time determination rate of 93%, which is the best in Gloucestershire and 20% higher than at Tewkesbury. Some applications do take longer, but these are the ones on which there is extensive pre-engagement, including working with parish councils and county councils. This is an essential part of the process, which for example has led to Miller Homes agreeing to fit a number of electric car charging points, and solar panels on 146 properties. If this had been rushed through, these conditions would not have been applied. We have an outstanding determination rate, but some complex applications naturally take longer. These examples do not affect the housing supply as they are on identified land.																																
12.	Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood																																
	<p>What is the staff turnover rate for planning officers in the last year and how does this compare to the previous 5 years?</p> <p>How are reasons for staff turnover investigated, for example through exit interviews?</p> <p>What staff retention methods are in place, for example, reward schemes, employee engagement, and health and well-being initiatives?</p>																																

	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you Councillor Nelson for your question. There are 16 employees in the planning team, 6 people have left in the last 5 years. There have been two leavers in 2021, which would represent an annual turnover rate of 12.5%. The average employee turnover rate in the UK is around 15%. Any employee leaving the Council will be invited to complete an exit interview questionnaire. A member of the HR team will follow up with a telephone call to discuss and further investigate reasons for leaving. The results are then fed back to the line manager and escalated where necessary.</p> <p>Cheltenham Borough Council conducted a wellbeing survey in April 2021 which attracted an 85% response rate, demonstrating that employees are engaged and interested. 90% of respondents rated their personal wellbeing as okay, good or very good.</p> <p>The Council deliver a range of employee wellbeing initiatives, discounts and engagement opportunities throughout the year alongside the reward package attached to being a Council employee such as a generous holiday entitlement, excellent pension scheme, cycle to work scheme, flexible working environment and employee welfare service.</p>
	Supplementary question
	<p>It is reassuring to hear that the staff turnover rate is below the national average, and of the wellbeing initiatives being offered. Have the two vacancies arising this year been filled, and if not, at what stage in the recruitment process are we?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I cannot answer this without the information to hand, but I will find out and contact Cllr. Nelson outside of the meeting.</p>

9. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23

The Cabinet Member Finance introduced the report and explained that each year since 2013 the council has been required to set its local council tax support scheme for working age residents. Council tax support for pensioners was not localised and continued to be provided for by a national scheme.

The cost of the scheme is funded by this council and the precepting authorities in proportion to the share of council tax. Funding for the scheme was initially cut by 10% in 2013/4 then was rolled into revenue support grant and subject to annual cuts. As this Council no longer receives revenue support grant it must fund its share of the cost of the scheme.

Despite the reduction in funding this council continued to provide the same level of support to working age residents that was available under the former council tax benefit scheme. By 2018/19 CBC was one of only 36 councils that hadn't made changes to their scheme to reduce the cost.

In 2019/20 a new scheme was approved. One of the main aims was to ensure that the most vulnerable and those with the lowest incomes continued to receive 100% support. The scheme is based on 5 income bands with the highest band

providing support at 100% of the council tax liability, then reducing to 80%, 60%, 40% and 20% as household income increases.

In the first year of the scheme the overall costs reduced and the most vulnerable and those with the lowest incomes were protected. Due to the impact of Covid the caseload for working age people increased significantly in 2020/21 and was up by 25% in April 2021. The Cabinet outlined the following :

1st March 2020

3,984 recipients cost £3.3million

1st April 2021

4,988 recipients cost £4.7million

31 October 2021

4,839 recipients cost £4.5million (Later point than figures in the report)

Despite the increase in the number of working age residents who require assistance, the council continued to provide 100% support to the most vulnerable and those with the lowest incomes. During 2021/22 the income bands were increased so that residents benefitting from the £20 Universal Credit uplift would not be penalised because of this additional income. For 2022/23 the income bands are being maintained and will remain at the higher level. This will benefit residents if they choose to take on extra work as a result of losing the £20 uplift.

The Cabinet Member explained that although the number of working age residents receiving council tax support was now reducing it was anticipated that it will continue to reduce slowly. The caseload in 2022/23 is expected to remain higher than at pre-pandemic levels. Many people are still recovering financially from the effects of the pandemic and the scheme will provide the vital help they need during 2022/23.

He wished to put on record his thanks to all the officers in the revenue and benefits teams for what has been an extraordinary amount of work during the last 12 months supporting residents in the town.

The following responses were given to Member questions :

- The total amount of council tax support was not currently fluctuating to any great degree despite changes as claimants moved back into work for example
- The council has discretion on what council tax support is provided
- The Cabinet Member Finance undertook to respond at a later date on the financial impact on the council of the universal credit uplift due to the detail required to work out the margin.

In the debate that followed a Member welcomed the fact that the council provided this discretionary support, expressing disappointment that this was not funded nationally to ensure people were treated equally. There was significant poverty in working-age families not just in Cheltenham but nationwide and this

should be considered from a communities point of view, rather than just financially.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that

- 1) the council tax support scheme for 2022/23 for working age customers in Appendix 2 and summarised in Appendix 3 be approved.**
- 2) authority be delegated 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. TREASURY MID-TERM REPORT 2021/22

The Cabinet Member Finance introduced the report which formed part of the council's annual financial monitoring. The report has been reviewed and scrutinised by the Treasury Management Panel which recommends to Council that the comments are noted.

He reflected that following 10 years of austerity and a commitment to fund discretionary services such as leisure and culture, the Council had looked to commercialise its operations wherever possible. With the cost of services at £22m and income from taxation and grants equalling £14m, the void of £8m had to be filled through trading and investment income.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that it was critical to get the right balance between social, environmental, and financial factors and to not lose sight of the fact that the treasury portfolio was diversified to maximise the return to ensure that the £7m costs associated with discretionary services such as leisure and culture could be maintained.

He brought Members' attention to the fact that exposure to gas and oil investments currently stood at £280k. This was part of the Schroder Income Fund and made up 4% of the £7m invested in Pooled Funds. Given the council's current climate priorities he assured Council that steps were being taken to ensure our investments are contributing to our goals and the council's climate commitment. He explained that this investment was part of a £2m pooled fund taken out in 2018 before the climate emergency was declared in Cheltenham. On advice from our treasury advisors, the investment was made for 5-7 years which should provide a long-term return with annual dividend income to support the general fund. He also noted that it was also an equity pooled fund which are very sensitive to changes in the money markets. When there is a significant downturn in the market, for example in the first lockdown, the investment can lose value. The capital value of this fund fell at this time but has recovered some of its lost value and at the end of October it was valued just over £1.5m.

The Cabinet Member expressed the council's commitment longer term to reduce investment in oil and gas but this needed to be balanced with ensuring we are making the right financial decisions to safeguard our residents,

businesses, and communities. The performance of this fund would continue to be closely monitored and when it is financially prudent to do so, the climate implications of how we invest this money in the future would be considered.

Finally, the Cabinet Member Finance explained that treasury management activity continued to perform well, and he wished to thank Officers and Members of the Treasury Management Panel for their work and support in this area.

In response to Member questions the following responses were given :

- The Treasury Management Panel was always looking at the route towards a policy of divestment from particular investments and work was currently ongoing on a broader treasury management policy into which TMP would input.
- Investments in fossil fuels were made prior to the council's commitments, but they should not happen in the future.

In the debate that followed the Cabinet Member was thanked for this impressive work within the national context; a stable budget and the debt situation was a real achievement.

RESOLVED THAT

the contents of the summary report of the treasury management activity during the first six months of 2021/22 be noted.

11. PROCESS FOR DETERMINING ANY APPLICATIONS AND APPEALS FOR THE PAYMENT OF DISCRETIONARY AWARDS (UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISCRETIONARY PAYMENTS) (INJURY ALLOWANCES) REGULATIONS 2011 OR SUBSEQUENT LEGISLATION)

The Chief Executive introduced the report as Head of Paid Service, emphasising the council's commitment to supporting the wellbeing of its employees. There were rare occasions where injury or illness occurred while at work, and this report related to discretionary awards in these cases. There was a statutory requirement to have a policy in place to assist with the determination of these cases when they arise.

The following responses were given to Member questions by the Legal Officer /Chief Executive:

- It was good practice and now a statutory requirement to have a policy in place
- It related to both mental wellbeing and physical injury
- The trade unions had been consulted on the draft policy and had not raised any particular concerns
- The regulations worked independently and if allowances were paid they were on a no fault basis The allowance was limited to employees of the local government pension scheme-Members were excluded

- The report aimed to put a fair process in place, with the priority being the health and wellbeing of employees

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT

1. authority be delegated to Directors (in consultation with Human Resources) to determine applications (including any review of the amount payable) under the 1996 Regulations and/or 2011 Regulations (or subsequent regulations) made by those employees on NJC terms and conditions
2. authority be delegated to Executive Directors and/or the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer or Section 151 Officer (in consultation with Human Resources) to determine internal appeals under the 2011 Regulations (or subsequent regulations) made by employees on the NJC terms and conditions
3. authority be delegated to Executive Directors and/or the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer or Section 151 Officer (in consultation with Human Resources) to determine applications (including any review of the amount payable) under the 1996 Regulations and/or 2011 Regulations (or subsequent regulations) made by employees on JNC terms and conditions
4. authority be delegated to Executive Directors and/or the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer or Section 151 Officer (in consultation with Human Resources) to determine internal appeals under the 2011 Regulations (or subsequent regulations) made by employees on the JNC terms and conditions
5. In the case of an internal appeal under the 2011 Regulations (or subsequent regulations) where there is no officer who is able to determine an internal appeal, the Appeals Committee determine the internal appeal
6. the Policy Statement as set out in Appendix 1 be approved and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, be authorised to make any minor amendments to the Policy Statement

12. COUNCIL MOTION UPDATE REPORT

The Chair of Overview & Scrutiny introduced the report. He explained that the recent meeting with senior representatives of the health service had been both engaging and productive and he wished to thank them for attending to talk about the pressures they were facing. He emphasised the main messages of how Members could assist and support which was principally by encouraging residents to access care in the appropriate way. Communication was key.

The Chair was thanked by the Leader and Members for chairing the meeting and the manner in which valid questions were posed and responded to by the NHS

Members recognised the Leader's efforts in joining with South West Councils, the LGA and the District Councils network to put effective pressure on government to address the issues raised.

Members thanked all staff in the health and social care systems, recognising the significant pressures they were under.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT

the update report be noted.

13. NOTICES OF MOTION

There were none.

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

None.

**15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 -EXEMPT INFORMATION
RESOLVED THAT**

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

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

**16. EXEMPT MINUTES
RESOLVED THAT**

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 18 October be approved and signed as a correct record.

Steve Harvey
Chairman

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