

## Council

**Monday, 21st March, 2022**  
**2.30 - 6.30 pm**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Councillors:</b>	Sandra Holliday (Vice-Chair), Victoria Atherstone, Matt Babbage, Paul Baker, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Ian Bassett-Smith, Nigel Britter, Jonny Brownsteen, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Rowena Hay, Martin Horwood, Alisha Lewis, Chris Mason, Andrew McKinlay, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, John Payne, Julie Sankey, Louis Savage, Diggory Seacome, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

## Minutes

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs. Boyes, Collins, Harvey, Hegenbarth, Jeffries and Stafford.

In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor chaired the meeting.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

One Member noted that in the third supplementary question in item 8, they had referred to the international situation rather than the financial situation, and asked that this be amended.

With that change in mind, the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> February were approved and signed as a correct record.

### 4. COMMUNICATIONS BY THE MAYOR

The Leader said that everyone is shocked and appalled by Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, and that the courage shown by Ukrainian people in face of the devastation this has caused is nothing short of remarkable. She said that, at the time she wrote her speech, over 3 million Ukrainians had already fled their country since 24<sup>th</sup> February, and this figure is probably a lot higher now. Cheltenham is home to 120 residents of Ukrainian heritage, and stands in solidarity with them, recognising the role the council will play in coordinating initiatives to provide safe refuge for Ukrainian refugees in the UK. The incredible support from Cheltenham residents offering homes, goods and money to traumatised families is heartening but also sad, because of the necessity.

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

The Leader began by wishing the wife and baby of the Chief Executive a speedy recovery from Covid.

She said Cheltenham had seen a record number of visitors at the previous week's race festival, providing a vital boost to the town's economy. She thanked officers for helping to keep residents and visitors safe, the council's partners – Ubico, the police, transport providers, and the Jockey Club – for their invaluable contribution, and officers from South Gloucestershire, Avon and Somerset Police, and the City of Wolverhampton for assistance with taxi and private hire checks on Thursday.

With local elections just around the corner, she took the opportunity to wish luck on any Members who were standing for re-election, and to thank those who have decided not to seek re-election for all their time given to democracy in representing their communities. In particular she thanked Councillor McKinlay, who would be standing down after 31 years of public service, saying she would particularly miss his historical knowledge of past council decisions.

She advised that receipt of a 750-signature petition at the March Council meeting, concerning women's safety and lighting of Sandford Park and other public areas, together with other active petitions raising similar concerns, would trigger a council debate. Although the council doesn't have direct control over the wider issues of safety, she confirmed that it should have an active role and that, in order to ensure a meaningful debate, she had arranged a meeting with the PCC, Cheltenham's MP, and GCC and CBC cabinet members for safety. The first available meeting for the Council debate is June; she reassured Members that the issue of safety is extremely important and not taken lightly, but could not be achieved by CBC alone – it needed government intervention and work with partners.

Returning to events in Ukraine, the Leader reaffirmed that Cheltenham and the council stood in solidarity with the town's Ukrainian community, and welcomed the recently-launched Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, under which Ukrainians who are awarded visas can live and work in the UK for up to three years, with access to public services, on the understanding that the Sponsor is able to provide accommodation for a minimum of six months. Phase One will link UK sponsors with named contacts from Ukraine, and the visa application process opened on 18<sup>th</sup> March. To help them settle into their new homes and local communities, GARAS (Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) will work with a range of agencies to inform and raise awareness, as well as providing ongoing support and advice to refugees and asylum seekers in Cheltenham and across the county. She welcomed this important work and thanked GARAS for their assistance.

She said the government has advised that £10,500 will be provided to local authorities for each person arriving in the UK under this scheme, with additional funding for child education, to support families and help them to integrate. Further details will follow from government, and expressions of interest from UK residents without a named contact are now being accepted in readiness for the

launch of Phase Two. In the meantime, district and borough councils across Gloucestershire are working closely to prepare to welcome new arrivals, and have agreed in principle to provide additional financial support to GARAS and to jointly finance a county-wide co-ordinator who will oversee the delivery of the scheme.

She confirmed that Cheltenham will do everything possible to support Ukrainian families, and is proud to be part of a town where refugees are welcome as a place of sanctuary. With guidance changing constantly, she committed to ensuring all Members are kept as updated as possible.

**6. TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**

One Member submitted two petitions on behalf of the Friends of Sandford Park group. The first related to additional lighting, as addressed by the Leader in her briefing, while the second related to an unoccupied building which they hoped would become a focal point for the community rather than be disposed of.

**7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

**8. MEMBER QUESTIONS**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay</b>
	In Cheltenham we recognise and respect the diversity in both sexual orientation and gender identity within our town. CBC is a proud member of the LGBT+ partnership. However, the UK was named as a country of concern in a recent Congress of Council of Europe Report. The role of addressing this at local level is crucial, where the effects of hate speech is most visible. In the word of Harald Bergmann, spokesperson on Human Rights to the Council of Europe “Local Authorities are the first line of defence of human rights but also the launching pad for their application”. In light of the rise of hate speech and hate crimes across Europe and the recent, horrifying suspected homophobic attack in our town, and in line with our values, will the Leader of the Council outline what we can do, as a Council, at a local level to prevent this sort of hate crime in Cheltenham?
	<b>Response from the Leader</b>
	Thank you for your question. This is a really important issue and I want to use your question as an opportunity to reassert this council’s commitment to tackling hate crime in all its guises.  We first adopted a corporate approach to hate crime in 2010, and I am pleased that we have continued to support collective efforts particularly through the Gloucestershire county <u><a href="#">hate crime strategy</a></u>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure attendance at Hate Crime events</li> <li>• Calling out hate-crime through all our work eg social media</li> <li>• Community leadership role – elected members to be more informed on hate</li> </ul>

	<p>crime and to give them the confidence to challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for community organisations that are working to challenge hate crime and promote community cohesion</li> <li>• Elected member seminar about hate crime to involve the police and hate crime county lead</li> <li>• Involvement in hate crime awareness week in October  <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/">https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/</a></li> </ul> <p>But as your question reminds us, we must never be complacent about an issue like hate crime that can cause so much devastation for its victims.</p> <p>I would like to set out some areas where I think we can all do more as a collective body of elected representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can be more informed on types of hate crime and the impact on victims and the wider community</li> <li>• We can be clearer in our roles as community leaders and have more confidence to challenge and be able to call out hate crime through all our work.</li> <li>• We can look at how we support our community organisations that are working to challenge hate crime and that are promoting community cohesion</li> <li>• We should commit to being involved in hate crime awareness week in October  <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/">https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/</a></li> </ul> <p>One suggestion I would like to propose is to hold a member seminar about hate crime, after the elections, that will involve the police hate crime leads and the county hate crime coordinator.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood</b>
	<p>An important part of the democratic process is citizens' access to our democratic institutions. Currently, our Municipal Offices are still closed to the public. In light of national Covid restrictions being significantly relaxed, could the leader please confirm when the Municipal Offices will start to re-open again to the residents of Cheltenham.</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>We are very much committed to opening up our reception in the Municipal Offices to the public later on in the summer. Our customers' experience and safety are our highest priorities and we have taken the opportunity to learn some lessons from the pandemic to make some alterations that will offer improved customer service, including our digital inclusion offer, and create safer meeting spaces within reception.</p> <p>Whilst the majority of our customers are now successfully conducting business online or over the phone, we have continued to see customers face to face on an appointment basis throughout the pandemic. Pre-booked appointments have delivered an effective and improved customer experience, as we have been able to ensure that the appropriate staff are available to meet with customers and handle their enquiries. This is something that we will continue to offer when the reception reopens.</p>

	<p>As the council moves ahead with the implementation of its digital platform we are very mindful of our residents who may not be online or have a smart phone - the improved digital service within the reconfigured reception will mean that customers, who otherwise may be at risk of digital exclusion, can have supported access to the internet.</p> <p>The plans for the refurbishment are currently underway and we are looking forward to work starting, subject to the availability of building resources during this time, and reopening our doors to the public later on in the summer. Regular updates on progress will soon be reported.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie</b>
	<p>I'm sure you will be aware that after a long postponement, parking charges have finally begun at the Pump Room. These charges, unlike previously suggested by the cabinet and councillors, contains no limited free time period.</p> <p>a) Could the member explain why there has been a change to the original plan to have an initial 2 hour free period, and whether similar arrangements will be introduced at Albemarle Gate?</p> <p>b) Could the member also explain what they intend to do with the money generated from the parking charges, and does the member expect the new parking charges to effect the amount of people using the park?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>As Councillor Fifield may be aware, the agreed introduction of charges at the Pittville Pump Room car park has not been without its teething problems and we have therefore reviewed feedback from both customers and the Cheltenham Trust who operate the Pittville Pump Room, to try our best to address these.</p> <p>a) We have been operating the car park with an initial two hour free period, but this has given rise to some confusion, as customers were unable to 'top up' their initially chosen stay period if they did not purchase a 4 hour ticket on arrival, but wished to stay longer than originally planned. In addition, the option to 'Pay by Phone' was not available – this is because parking sessions could not then be provided free of charge for the first two hours, as the service itself attracts a minimum 10p charge. The council could potentially have covered this charge, but would then have been incurring costs for all stays up to two hours.</p> <p>Customers, staff and performers at the Pittville Pump Room (PPR) also raised concerns that the previous maximum 4 hour stay period was insufficient and this was giving rise to regular complaints, especially from elderly and/or mobility impaired customers least able to walk from alternative parking locations.</p> <p>The introduction of charges at Albermarle Gate car park is still an option, but has not been implemented to date, whilst paid for parking arrangements are still being adjusted at the PPR site.</p> <p>b) Cllr Fifield may not be aware that car parking charges cannot be introduced with the express intention of generating an income surplus. However, there</p>

	<p>were a number of reasons for introducing charges at the PPR, including helping to manage congestion and preventing all day and overnight parking by students, residents and visitors.</p> <p>Car parks require regular inspection for health and safety and maintenance purposes, as well as to enforce parking restrictions. This does not come cheaply and neither does the signage, surfacing, planting maintenance, lighting and utilities associated with operating a car park.</p> <p>The introduction of modest parking charges does not appear to have impacted the number of people using the PPR, or those enjoying the high level of public amenity afforded by Pittville Park.</p> <p>I do not anticipate that the charges introduced at PPR will result in an income surplus and this was never the intention. Anyone can use the car park for up to an hour for just £1, or can visit free of charge on a Sunday.</p>
	<b>Supplementary question</b>
	Has the introduction of parking charges had any effect on footfall and, if so, how has this been assessed?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	I would need to consult with officers to provide more specific statistics and respond in more detail, but the use of car parks is a handy indicator and this was not diminished by the car parking charges.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas</b>
	The recent budget meeting accepted an amendment from the Conservative Group to allocate 50K for Community grants to commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee. Can the cabinet member inform Council when the scheme will be launched and outline the process by which grants be applied for “
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>'As all Councillors will be aware, and as the minutes of the Council meeting confirm, the amendment mentioned in the question by the Conservative Leader was heavily defeated, with only 6 votes in favour.</p> <p>I am sure that all members would not wish to see the Platinum Jubilee turned into a political football. It is therefore disappointing that this question appears to do just that and seek to drive a wedge through what should be a united response.</p> <p>To answer the question in relation to what has been organised, firstly I am sure all members will wish to join me in stating our great appreciation for Her Majesty's commitment and unstinting service to the people of our town, region, country and Commonwealth. She has been, and is, an inspirational leader from whom many others could learn.</p> <p>My thanks to Cllr Jeffries, Cabinet colleagues and officers, for enabling Cheltenham, unlike many other authorities, to have surplus funds available for celebrating the Jubilee. Working with other organisations will enable this funding to create memorable events for communities across Cheltenham.</p> <p>I am pleased to report that the Community Jubilee funds are now live on the council's</p>

	<p>website.</p> <p>The application criteria has been kept deliberately broad in recognition that good ideas could come from a range of sources including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local communities and third sector organisation</li> <li>• trade and business representative organisations</li> <li>• cultural and creative organisations</li> <li>• local schools and other educational institutions</li> </ul> <p>We have also come up with a number of jubilee themes which will help create a legacy for future generations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to bring people together, connecting people to build relationships across generations and our many diverse communities and cultures.</li> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help improve local buildings or green spaces</li> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help Cheltenham meet its Cheltenham zero carbon target.</li> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help make Cheltenham a place where all our children and young people have the opportunity to thrive</li> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to deliver projects that fuse arts, digital and heritage innovation to support creative and inclusive communities</li> <li>• Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to support economic activity, supporting local retail areas and bringing people into the town</li> </ul> <p>I hope we can all play our role in promoting the jubilee funds and working with our local groups and organisations and give them the encouragement to bid for the funds.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries</b>
	<p>With energy prices now soaring and the longstanding under utilisation of the Municipal offices (since well before the pandemic), how does the Council justify the continued retention of the Muni which is increasingly expensive to heat, light and maintain?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Thank you, Cllr Nelson, for your question.</p> <p>The Municipal office is an iconic building set in the heart of our town, our stewardship of the building on behalf of the residents of our town I take extremely seriously. Prior to the pandemic this council agreed to the purchase of additional office space, for not only a revenue income but as a potential new home for the council. The question however, in my mind has always been if the council relocates what happens to this iconic building.</p> <p>We as a council and a town have been navigating the recovery from the economic shockwave we received from the pandemic, this undoubtedly has thrown up additional questions that need to be considered in relation to the municipal offices, equally the current cost of living crisis has added another more immediate challenge.</p> <p>To meet this challenge, throughout the budget setting process, work has been ongoing to understand the impact of inflation and rising energy costs on our services</p>

	<p>and that includes the cost of running the Municipal Offices. We set out our savings strategy within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which was unanimously approved at the February Council meeting. This includes rationalising the space we are using within the Municipal Office by bringing staff currently on the second and third floor down to the first floor. Work has also been carried out to install smart meters throughout the Municipal Offices to allow much closer monitoring of electricity and gas usage and make interventions and improvements to the management of the building in real time.</p> <p>Whilst we are utilising less space in the building, we have also been investing in resource within the property team to increase the capacity to manage and maintain the Municipal building, we are also being financially prudent during these turbulent economic times, and this is expected to generate a base budget saving in 2022/23.</p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie</b>
	<p>The 2022/23 County Council Budget includes £120k to fund Circular Economy Projects including the establishment of a pilot "Tip Shop" re-use outlet scheme at County Council controlled recycling centres. At a time when we are all encouraged to recycle more, does the Council agree that this could be a beneficial cross-party initiative. Would you agree to adopt and trial a similar scheme at the Swindon Road Depot thereby reducing landfill and further supporting current "upcycling" and "repair shop" trends?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>Following a budget amendment, I am pleased to say that Gloucestershire County Council did approve £120k capital for a reuse shop at one of the GCC operated household recycling centres and officers are currently planning where, when and how this will be implemented.</p> <p>I think we would all agree that the responsibility for responding to the climate emergency sits with everyone and this sort of initiative supports this. I should also like to remind members that none of the waste collected by us in Cheltenham goes to landfill.</p> <p>In June 2019 Cheltenham Borough Council agreed to invest in its household recycling centre in Swindon Road and officers worked with various 3rd parties to seek to achieve a re-use shop on the site but unfortunately space constraints combined with health and safety issues made this impossible.</p> <p>I am keen to reduce waste and promote re-use, as well as recycling, across the borough and we are currently working with Vision 21 and other 3rd parties to seek to increase re-use across Cheltenham via other more accessible ways for residents whilst ensuring we continue to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>Members may have also seen that we are working with the Butterfly Garden to ensure hard to recycle items such as CD's, DVD's and VHS tapes are recycled. I am also proud to say that our pioneering kerbside coffee pod collection scheme has collected and recycled around 1 million coffee pods already and these have been collected by us at our household recycling centre in Swindon Road for years before this.</p>
	<b>Supplementary question</b>

	Given that we are now almost three years on from June 2019 – the last time a re-use shop at the depot was looked at – and given public enthusiasm to re-use recycle and upcycle, would CBC be prepared to look again at this, maybe in partnership with Vision 21?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	Thanks to Councillor Nelson for the original and supplementary. The principle of re-use is very close to my heart and I would like to answer positively, but the response already given makes it clear that there is very little possibility for a re-use centre at Cheltenham’s existing recycling centre. However, I am working closely with other organisations such as Vision 21 and other charities to provide location for such a centre. Also, I would like to thank GCC for its work in putting in capital money for a re-use centre. This is a great opportunity to work with GCC and charities, particularly Vision 21, to find a place where re-use can be pursued. This is not the end of the road – it is the start of the journey, and I’m confident that we will shortly find a place where this can happen here in Cheltenham.

**9. CAPITAL, INVESTMENT, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES  
2022/23**

In the absence of Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, the Leader introduced the item, reading from his prepared statement. Members approved the 2022/23 HRA and General Fund budget at the March meeting, and the Prudential Code, which acts as a professional code of practice to ensure capital gains are affordable, now required the Council to approve a capital strategy on an annual basis ahead of the forthcoming financial year. In addition, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities introduced new treasury management reporting guidance and the requirement to produce a separate Investment Strategy.

For 2021/22 a revised and updated set of strategic documents was approved by Council - the Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy, and Treasury Management Strategy – and council-wide consultation took place to reflect our collective vision for the use of assets and resources to drive the town’s post-pandemic economic recovery. These have been reviewed again in light of 2022/23 budget changes and the recently revised Asset Management Strategy approved by Council in February, including a commitment to review and divest from the 4% of our £7m pooled funds exposed to oil and gas to align with our climate priorities.

She also presented for approval the council’s Minimum Revenue Provision statement, setting out how repayments of our borrowings would be calculated, and the amount of voluntary overpayment the council continued to make.

CBC made a formal response and attended a roundtable event relating to the recent government consultation on changes to the capital framework relating to Minimum Revenue Provision, including the use of capital receipts to repay debt. The consultation has not published its conclusions but no changes would be introduced before 1 April 2023 and these would not be applied retrospectively.

She told Members that there has been no structural changes to these documents, but they had been updated to reflect the budget.

The Cabinet Member Climate Emergency noted that the strategy refers to the council's 'long-term' commitment to divesting from oil and gas, whereas the climate action plan wording refers to this being 'at the soonest possible moment', or words to that effect. He suggested that this should be reflected in the discussion and any documents in future.

One Member congratulated everyone involved in the document – the subjects are not easy but the document is clear, succinct, readable with good photography. He felt this complemented the exciting and ambitious content of the capital programme – affordable housing, investment in infrastructure, the Minster, the cyber park. He said the council should be very proud.

There was no debate, so the Leader summed up, agreeing with the Member's comments, and putting on record the thanks of the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets to Gemma Bell, the new Deputy S151 officer who has taken the documents and made a difference to the direction of travel.

She hoped that Members would approve the recommendations.

**RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT** the following recommendations be approved:

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- The Capital Strategy 2022/23 at Appendix 2;
- The Investment Strategy 2022/23 at Appendix 3;
- The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022/23 at Appendix 4; and
- The 2022/23 MRP Statement at Appendix 5.

## **10. COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION**

The Leader introduced the item, telling Members that the Electoral Commission had identified CBC as requiring an electoral review as there had been none since 2000/01 and there were some distinct variations in its wards. The initial stage of an electoral review was to determine the number of Councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government.

In a recent Member survey carried out in March 2022 to support the electoral review, 69% of respondents thought that 40 Councillors was an appropriate number for the borough. Elected Members who took part in the working group also requested that two other issues be considered as context for the electoral review:

- the drive for a more diverse and representative set of councillors – with 92% of councillors already spending over 15 hours a week on council business, and almost a quarter feeling that the time spent on council business was unmanageable, any increase in workloads would deter younger people of working age from becoming councillors;

- community needs – Members are spending a significant amount of time on community issues, supporting residents facing challenges with fuel, food and transport costs.

There are particular needs and issues in the more deprived wards that require particular attention and time, and in view of the fact that Cheltenham has the county's greatest extremes between its most and least deprived communities, the Overview and Scrutiny committee has agreed to set up a specific scrutiny task group to review whether CBC's policies and service delivery are targeted at working with communities to help them address the causal factors of multiple deprivation and working with other stakeholders to ensure that their efforts are similarly targeted.

The recent Member Survey revealed that:

- 92% of respondents spent more than 15 hours a week on council duties;
- of these, 27% spend 30% or more of their time reading papers in preparation for borough council meetings and 50% on constituency issues;
- 77% of respondents considered the time they spent on council activities was manageable;
- 50% of respondents did not receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA);
- 50% of Members who do receive an SRA spent fewer than five hours and 50% spent more than 15 hours on the additional workload.

Given the Council's responsibilities, it was considered that a continuation of 40 Councillors will give the Council sufficient capacity to effectively operate its current governance and decision-making arrangements, ensuring proper and timely consideration and making of decisions and sufficient representation on Committees and Sub-Committees. In addition, a council of 40 members ensured sufficient capacity to accommodate absences or unavailability without significant detrimental impact.

In response to a Member's question, the Leader confirmed that the county council was not used as a benchmark in terms of number of residents per councillor, as the county was not being considered as part of this review.

In debate, Members made the following points:

- the council had an obligation to properly represent residents; it was good to note that CBC's age demographics are better than other comparable councils, and there were more women councillors – but we can always do better;
- it would be folly to reduce the number of Members – CBC already exceeds the number of residents per councillor seen in neighbouring authorities, and with several upcoming major developments, the town will only get larger; it could be that more than 40 councillors will be needed in the future;
- Members who represent more affluent areas of the town may have a smaller workload than those who represent more deprived wards, which could give them an unrealistic view of the whole council's workload;
- it was important to have a broad variety of skills amongst councillors, and to ensure the local political system is open and inclusive to people from diverse backgrounds. The workload for some councillors was already

incompatible with full-time employment, depending on the ward they represented, and paperwork and preparation for some committees takes up a significant amount of time;

- although diversity is to be encouraged and welcomed, the wide knowledge, experience and expertise of older councillors is also vital – for many people, serving the community is a real calling, not just a job;
- borough councillors take on a lot of work that county councillors cannot do.

Members of the Conservative group took a different view to their fellow Members, saying that they had always advocated a reduction in the number of councillors, looking at the model set by the county council – there are four borough councillors for every county councillor, even though many of CBC's services have been outsourced. One Member felt the data to be inadequate, and that an assessment based on the number of hours worked was misleading – these may be duplicated and not carried out as effectively as they could be. He felt a more holistic approach was required.

The Leader summed up by saying it was important not to make this a political debate, and that the situation must be approached on its merits. It had been good to hear the viewpoints of councillors of various ages, and there were ways to reduce member workloads (e.g. hybrid working, virtual meetings), but the effect of this was always limited, for instance by the government's decision to end virtual meetings. The report was just one step on a larger journey, and there was still plenty of work to do. CBC would be bound by whatever decision the Boundary Commission make, but she hoped they would take the recommendations on board.

#### **RESOLVED THAT**

- the submission of Appendix 2 to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the proposed council size be approved

(For: 26; Against: 0; Abstentions:7)

#### **11. REVIEW OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND AND PLANS FOR 2022**

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities thanked colleagues for their support throughout the process, and particularly thanked Richard Gibson, Tracy Brown and Jen Tucker for their hard work. The report sought to illustrate where the project came from and what it had achieved. She highlighted particular problems such as digital poverty, which No Child Left Behind (NCLB) had alleviated by raising £35k to refurbish more than 120 computers for schools across the town. It had also focused on enabling access to play areas and food, and it was important to continue this in years to come. The NCLB awards night had taken place recently, with all nominees chosen by the children involved in the project.

The report asked councillors to support NCLB continuing for another year so that it could keep up its excellent work. The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities added that the Large Enterprise Action Group had been launched, with a number of major international companies involved with this, while the Cheltenham Education Partnership would go directly to young people to find out how they wanted to tackle the issues. She acknowledged the current

international situation, and the need to ensure people were not cold over the winter. It was also key to ensure the food network continued to operate and that school uniforms were open to all.

Members welcomed the report and thanked both the Cabinet Member and officers for the work being done. They made the following points:

- the project had clearly made a real difference to children's lives, and could be considered the most important work that the council was doing;
- it did a good job of highlighting the massive impact of the Covid crisis on children in the town, and if there were any future outbreaks, it was hoped that schools and play areas would not have to close;
- Members representing relatively deprived wards were especially thankful for the work done by NCLB. In one ward, 30% of children were living below the poverty line, and there was a major cost-of-living crisis in the country which will only get worse. Poverty had wide-reaching consequences, especially on education and life outcomes, and was not a solely financial matter. The national cuts in youth services had a significant delayed effect;
- it should be noted that more than 4,000 children in Cheltenham were living in poverty. The council was doing all it could to alleviate the situation, but improvement needed to be nationally led;
- even in relatively affluent areas of the town, there was poverty;
- the report was a fantastic example of how the council could deliver more than the sum of its parts by working in partnership with charities and other organisations. There were clear benefits to this approach, and it should be used in more areas.

The Cabinet Member Safety and Communities thanked Members for their comments. She stressed that children were the future, and if they were not supported properly then it would have ramifications throughout their lives.

#### **RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT**

- the progress achieved by No Child Left Behind since the last report to this council on 16 Dec 2019 be noted;
- the Council commit to support a fourth year of No Child Left Behind to be delivered in 2022;
- the Council agree to support May as a month of celebrating childhood and to commit to supporting the events and activities listed in section 10.

## **12. COUNCIL DIARY**

The Leader introduced the report, saying that the diary followed a similar rationale to that adopted in previous years, as follows:

- as far as possible meetings of a particular committee were scheduled on the same day of the week;
- school holidays and Friday evenings were avoided where possible, with the occasional exception of regulatory Planning and Licensing meetings;
- evening meetings were scheduled to start at 6pm to facilitate Members' attendance after a working day, but in the event of a large agenda, the

timing of some committee meetings (such as Planning and Licensing) would be reviewed on a meeting-by-meeting basis, with any time changes made in consultation with Members and advertised on the CBC website;

- Planning View has now been reinstated, currently to take place at 11am on the day before the Planning Committee meeting.

She thanked democratic services officers for the huge juggling exercise to fit everything in to the Corporate Diary.

There were no Member questions. In debate, a Member welcomed the return of Planning View but was concerned about the proposed timing, considering the day before the Thursday meeting was too close for it to be genuinely useful and productive. He suggested it revert to the Tuesday, as previously, or, as suggested by another Member, to the Thursday one week before the meeting for maximum benefit, allowing Members plenty of time to gather their thoughts and ask questions of officers prior to the meeting.

The Leader confirmed that Members' concerns have been listened to and the proposed time would be reviewed, following the April meeting. The Cabinet Member Regulatory Services suggested raising this cross-party concern at the next meeting of the recently-revived Planning Member Liaison Working Group meeting.

#### **RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT**

- the draft Council Diary of meetings for September 2022 – August 2023 be approved.

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

#### **Motion A**

Council calls

- on Gloucestershire County Council to adopt a proactive - rather than reactive - approach to allocating funding for road crossings. Putting preventing harm from happening in the first place at the heart of funding policy by assessing need based on which roads currently lack accessible safe designated crossing points in addition to the number of collisions and accidents;
- for the convention of a cross-council meeting between senior highways officers and the relevant cabinet member (Vernon Smith) and Cheltenham Borough and County Councillors in wards with particular road crossing concerns (WARDS) to develop a working plan for delivering the additional road crossings Cheltenham needs by year-end 2024;
- on Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet Member for Highways (Vernon Smith) to meet with local representatives from communities particularly impacted by missing road crossings in Cheltenham, including the blind and partially sighted, wheelchair and mobility aid users, and parent groups to understand the impact of underfunding this vital community infrastructure.

In proposing the motion, Cllr. Lewis noted that in her time as a councillor she had spoken to lots of families with young children, many of whom had concerns about road safety. Children needed to be able to walk to school safely, and this required designated crossings. The council had to put pressure on GCC to act. Current points-based system does not work, requires areas to have a certain number of accidents before they get the funding they need. Acknowledged funding limitations, but the price of not providing adequate road crossings is far greater. The town should be built around the needs of residents and pedestrians rather than cars. The problem was not one of attitude, but of resource allocation. Saving lives was not a political issue, and she hoped there would be cross-party support for this motion.

In seconding the motion, Cllr. Horwood highlighted the absurdity of the need for multiple accidents in a particular area before funding was allocated towards making it safer. This was closely linked to the planning process, with new developments continually springing up in dangerous areas, and he suggested that the council needed to take a more strategic approach in relation to new developments. He said the motion made a number of clear and reasonable calls to action, adding that the Council must support safe walking and cycling wherever it can, which also supports its climate goals.

In debate, several Members congratulated Cllr Lewis on bringing this major issue and important motion before Council, and said they fully supported it. They gave examples within their wards of places where safe crossings were badly needed, particularly for elderly residents, schoolchildren, and special needs students, but without accident statistics, there did not appear to be any funding from the County. They said the present system doesn't take new developments into account, and residents' views and experiences should be listened to, including the frequently-reported 'near misses' as well as actual accidents.

Members made the following points:

- as the council tries to encourage cycling and walking, road safety was essential;
- the lack of a comprehensive road safety policy at GCC was a disgrace, and there should at least be a mechanism to record and respond to residents' concerns, such as a road safety forum;
- Highways Local allowances given to county councillors for road safety measures were not adequate, and every councillor and resident knew of an unsafe crossing; the problem needed to be addressed at every level, not just GCC;
- the council has a duty under the Equalities Act to protect vulnerable people and make their lives simple and enjoyable, but we live in a country where car movement is prioritised over the movement of people;
- funds were not always allocated in a logical way and sometimes crossings ended up where they were not needed;
- the issue had been raised many times by many councillors over the years, but little progress had been made.

One Member asked that, when an issue was not within the statutory functions of the council, an officer report could be provided to offer apolitical advice on

dealing with it. He also asked the motions be published further in advance of the meeting to allow Members to review the issues properly. The Leader said she considered this motion to be more concerned with the safety issue than a specific question about facts and figures, and suggested the Member's request could be considered by the Constitution Working Group.

Some Members, whilst supporting the spirit of the motion, felt that the Council should avoid simplistic arguments about complicated issues. Whilst acknowledging public safety as a key concern for all councillors, they did not consider it was only a question of funding - Highways had a limited pool of funds, its officers regularly met with residents to discuss issues in detail, and there could be complications due to road layout, utilities etc.

One Member suggested Overview and Scrutiny as the appropriate place for the issue to be carried forward, and suggested an amended motion, with the preamble and the first bullet point removed. This was put to a vote and rejected by Members.

Supporters of the proposed amendment agreed that there were many ways to improve road safety and that the County must be held to account, but considered that their amended focussed on the mechanisms involved rather than politicking. They could not support the substantive motion as it stood because of what they considered to be its sensationalist and politicised language, and said cross-party work was needed to figure out the best solutions for the town as a whole.

Members were invited to vote on the following amendment, proposed by Cllr Babbage and seconded by Cllr Harman:

- to remove the preamble and the first bullet point.

The proposed amendment was rejected.

Cllr Lewis thanked colleagues for their contributions, and said it was disappointing that this was not a cross-party motion on which all Members could agree as she had hoped. She looked forward to taking the motion to the GCC cabinet member, emphasising that it was not a political statement but an effort to represent and protect residents. She said the County Council had sufficient funding but did not use it effectively.

The Deputy Mayor then moved to the vote on the substantive motion. This was as follows:

**26 in support**

**7 abstentions**

The motion was carried.

## **Motion B**

Council notes:

- That the opportunity to impose a 'sewage tax', as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, of 16% of water companies' pre-tax profits, was missed.

- That Cheltenham's MP has told local residents that the practice of sewage dumping happens in the River Chelt.

Council calls for:

- An end to the dumping of sewage in rivers, including the River Chelt.
- The introduction of a 'sewage tax' as outlined above to encourage water companies to end the practice of the dumping of sewage in rivers.

Council instructs:

An appropriate cabinet member to write to the MP for Cheltenham to ask him, as a Minister in the Government:

- To support the introduction of a sewage tax on water companies
- To explain why he did not vote for the Duke of Wellington's original amendment to the Environment Bill
- To explain why the government's Environment Bill does not set firm targets for an end to the dumping of sewage in rivers, including the River Chelt.

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In proposing the motion, Cllr Wilkinson said that rivers and streams should be clean, the home to plants and animals, not depositories for sewage, but unfortunately, this is the case – while water companies are making billions of pounds in profit every year, they retain the right to put untreated sewage into rivers. The issue has recently made the news, with Duke of Wellington's attempt to introduce an amendment to the Environment Act to end the practice. Unfortunately, the Government whips intervened, and proactively stopped the amendment from being supported. The issue remains a concern for all, and is happening in our area, with sewage discharged into the River Chelt.

He said the motion reflected the importance that this council placed on the environment, and continued the trend of the borough using its voice to call for better, ask questions, influence future government policy, and prevent future mistakes. It may prompt a future policy with a clear set of targets rather than the current loose wording, and use the tax system to tax the profits of water companies, encouraging them to take the issue more seriously.

He hoped Members would recognise that this was not a political motion, and vote in support to ensure Cheltenham's voice was heard, and all rivers across the country would benefit. He could see no reason not to support the motion.

In seconding the motion, Cllr Willingham said one of the combined sewer outfalls that polluted the River Chelt was in St Peter's ward, just upstream of St Peter's Park, where children and dogs played in the water, making this a particularly important issue for the people he represented. As county councillor, he was part of the Restore Our Rivers task group, looking at the problem across the county. He provided details of what water companies were allowed to discharge into rivers, which made disgusting reading. He said Cllr Wilkinson's motion demanded that government take the matter seriously, and put a tax on the practice to ensure that it wasn't in the interest of water companies or shareholders to continue this practice.

One Member said that the Duke of Wellington's amendment was well-meaning but wouldn't have worked, which is why it wasn't supported by Government.

Everyone wanted to see an end to the dumping of sewage, but while he could not support the motion, he could vote for the objective if it was put forward in a rational way.

In debate, Members made the following points:

- Cllr Wilkinson should be under no illusion that this is a political issue, as shown clearly by history: the government owned the water authorities, neglected them, privatised them, set up PLCs with all debts written off, and gave them £1b to clean up their act – but they haven't. CEOs are paid huge salaries, and their responsibility is to the board of directors; water authorities make enormous profits and it is cheaper to pay fines for dumping sewage than to change the system. We have the most polluted watercourses in Europe, yet the government recently voted to allow more sewage to be discharged into them than in previous years;
- rivers play a vital role in shaping communities as well as eco-systems – for activities, sports and games – and the health and well-being of people using them is a major consideration and concern.

In summing up, Cllr Wilkinson confirmed Cllr Willingham's concerns for his ward, which he raised as soon as the Duke of Wellington's amendment was voted down. He repeated that it was a shame the Environment Bill didn't include a measure to stop sewage from being dumped, and even the LibDems' simple suggestion that the number of animal deaths in watercourses be monitored was voted down by Conservative MPs in Parliament. He agreed that money was at the heart of the issue, and in spite of the market failure and clear need for government intervention, this was not forthcoming. He also shared concerns for those people engaging in leisure pursuits in polluted rivers and watercourses,

The Deputy Mayor moved to the vote on the motion. This was as follows:

**26 in support**

**7 abstentions**

The motion was carried.

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

There were none.

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

Members approved unanimously the following resolution:

"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 paragraphs 1, 2 and 3, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 1: Information relating to any individual

Paragraph 2: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual

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

**16. ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW**

In the absence of the Chief Executive, the Interim Monitoring Officer introduced the report, which related to a review of CBC's organisational structure. The Executive Director Finance and Assets and Executive Director People and Change responded to Member questions.

The Deputy Mayor moved to the vote, where Members approved unanimously the recommendations as set out in the report.

**Chairman**

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