

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 12 December 2022

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 8.20 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Sandra Holliday (Chair), Matt Babbage (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Ian Bassett-Smith, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Alisha Lewis, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, John Payne, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Louis Savage, Diggory Seacome, Izaac Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and Dr David Willingham

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive), Paul Jones (Executive Director of Finance, Assets and Regeneration), Darren Knight (Executive Director of Place and Communities), Paul Minnis (Director of Major Development and Regeneration) and Ann Wolstencroft (Head of Performance, Projects & Risk)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs. Barnes and Oliver.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the 17th October meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor invited volunteers from the COP 26 Climate Vigil to present a quilt, which sought to build on COP 26 and the annual UN Conference of the Parties climate change conference.

One of the volunteers explained that the quilt gave residents the opportunity to show solidarity with the aims of COP 26, express their hopes, dreams and suggestions for a carbon neutral future, and send a message that the people of Cheltenham wanted action taken on climate change. Based on the principles of Craftivism, they had held a vigil in the Promenade for every day of the conference, and were delighted by how many people stopped to write their messages. She thanked everyone who had contributed, and hoped that the quilt would be on permanent display as well as a moving display around Cheltenham. It was a living testament that should offer stimulus for further creativity and action. They held another short vigil during this year's COP 27, and continued this every 27th of the month on the Promenade.

Speaking as the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Cllr. Lewis thanked all the volunteers and contributors for their work on a strong visual reminder of how we needed to take the climate seriously, and looked forward to building on this in the New Year.

She then expressed her condolences to the families of Lord Nigel Jones and former county councillor Mike Skinner, both of whom had recently passed away. She had the pleasure of knowing and working alongside Mike, who was the most gentle soul, a true gentleman, and a dedicated and hard-working councillor. The late Andy Pennington had introduced her to Nigel back in the early 90s, and she remembered watching the declaration on TV in the Bell the night he was elected as Cheltenham's MP. Nigel worked extremely hard for the town and its residents, and was very popular and a genuinely nice man, as well as a great support of Cheltenham Town FC. He was a true ambassador for the town who would be sadly missed by all who knew him. She opened up the floor for Group Leaders and any other Members who wished to express their own thanks.

Cllr. Harman added that Mike Skinner was an absolute gentleman as well as a quiet and hard-working councillor who did a lot behind the scenes in St Mark's in particular. He had also worked with Nigel Jones for a long time, recalled the 1992 count when he was first elected, and had fond memories of their time together at the cricket festival. Despite their political differences, they always got on well.

The Leader of the Council reiterated what both the Mayor and Cllr. Harman had said. Nigel was a great friend and had a great influence on many members of her group in one form or another and would be sorely missed by all, and she sent best wishes to his family in this tough time. Cllr. Payne echoed the reflections of fellow councillors on the passing of two really important people in the community.

Cllr. Flynn added that it was Nigel who had persuaded her to enter politics in the first place more than 20 years ago, and that he was a good, caring man held in high regard in West Cheltenham in particular. She would miss his presence in the world. Mike Skinner was also a lovely man who worked very hard for his community, and she had been grateful to be able to attend his funeral. She passed on her thoughts to both of their families.

The Mayor added that she had had the privilege of accepting an award and plaque at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) awards for the work done on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. This had been a partnership project with Charlton Kings Parish Council, Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common and the Cotswold

National Landscape Teams together with Cotswold wardens and volunteers. The award demonstrated sustainability and resulted in significant improvements to the environment and facilities for communities, with the introduction of two breeds of cattle onto Leckhampton Hill, improved access for all, and securing almost £175k grant funding from the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative. She thanked all those involved in delivering this.

She added that the Royal British Legion had thanked the council for its support with the Remembrance Sunday service and other remembrance events during the year. She highlighted the contributions of Jennie Ingram, Bob Bishop, the sound team and Parks and Gardens had been willing to engage proactively to ensure that this and other events ran smoothly. It was important to give those working in the background the recognition they deserved.

The Mayor welcomed the new Monitoring Officer, Claire Hughes, to her first Full Council meeting. She sent best wishes to Reverend Gary Grady, who was highly respected in Warden Hill, as he awaited an operation, and thanked all those who had contributed to the Mayor's charities. Finally, she reminded Members that the carol concert would take place at St Marks' Church on Thursday 15th December at 7pm, and wished everyone a happy Christmas and all the best for 2023.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader reported that the Golden Valley development was moving along at pace, and the planning application for the Innovation Centre was progressing well. Both the CBC team and their partners at HBD had been recently working on social value workshops with partners and community groups, looking at key economic, cultural, environmental and community issues.

The latest residents' survey had been published, and she highlighted that the kerbside collection satisfaction rates were among the highest out of all council services. One reason for this was that they had extended their range of recyclables, becoming the first council in the country to recycle coffee pods at the kerbside, and were now piloting the collection of soft plastics with a wider rollout planned in the New Year.

The council had also been awarded government funding for a viability study on heat networks, both for Golden Valley and the Town Centre, looking into how these networks could deliver low-cost, low-carbon energy to homes and businesses.

She reported that the climate team had been invited by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) to share their climate decision wheel, which was now incorporated into all Cabinet and Council reports. It was excellent to see CBC leading innovative decision-making and already making good use of it in major decisions like Golden Valley.

Finally, as this was the last meeting before Christmas, she thanked officers and partners for their amazing work, and emphasised that the council could not do what it did without them.

6 To receive petitions

There were none.

7 Public Questions

1. Question from Dr Cook to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Between April 2019 and March 2022, Cheltenham Borough Council paid leasing costs for the mayor's car of £14 439, with a further £1079 spent on fuel. This is the highest amount paid by any council in the South West. If the leasing costs had not been paid, we could have paid for 6275 children to have hot meals in the coming Christmas Holidays. How can the council justify spending so much on leasing costs for the car, when council finances are so limited, and whilst many Cheltenham residents are sat in cold homes, and struggling to feed themselves or their children?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for the question. We are proud of the work that the Mayor of Cheltenham does to support civic life in Cheltenham. While the global pandemic has impacted Mayoral engagements in 2020 and 2021, in a typical year the Mayor attends hundreds of engagements, sometimes 3 or 4 in the same day. Firstly it is not realistic to use public transport for the Mayor's schedule as the bus services, which are the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council, are neither reliable nor frequent enough. Secondly, the Mayor wears a chain of historical significance and heritage value, therefore retaining a car is preferable for safety.

It is also important to remember that a key part of the role of Mayor is to raise money for their chosen charities. Over the last ten years £195k has been raised for local good causes doing absolutely essential and valuable work in our communities. Therefore the cost of leasing a car should be offset against the funds raised which are far in excess of the annual cost of leasing a green and sustainable car.

One of the Mayor's charities for this year is #feedcheltenham which directly helps people who are struggling to feed themselves and their families. I hope the Mayor succeeds in raising as much money for this essential cause as possible during these difficult and challenging times.

Supplementary question from Dr Cook to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Thank you for the answer. I am sorry to hear that the Mayor feels it is unsafe to travel on public transport. If, both as a society and at this council, provided the necessary support and benefits for those in need, there would be no need for charity.

What lower-cost travel solutions have been explored, and if these are not possible due to safety risks, can these be mitigated – for example, by using a protective case for the mayoral chain? If public transport is not feasible, could a daily car hire be more cost-effective than leasing a vehicle for a year?

The Mayor clarified that the original response had described travelling by bus as unrealistic rather than unsafe. She added that the route nearest to her did not run during the week.

Response from Cabinet Member

Some years ago, this authority owned a car specifically for the Mayor, and paid for its maintenance and storage. This was gotten rid of in order to save money, with a leased electric vehicle being the most appropriate replacement. I remember that when my husband was Mayor in 2012, we often walked to events, but this was not always possible. The cost of insuring the Mayor's chain would likely increase significantly if she were to regularly walk to events rather than use a car. I have no aversion to looking at different options for the Mayor's transport, but using a bicycle or scooter while wearing the chain is hardly realistic. The Mayor could drive herself, but it is really important to ensure that she arrives at events on time, as many of them are scheduled around her arrival. In order to do that, a dedicated driver is needed, and alternatives are unlikely to work on this level.

2. Question from Dr Cook to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

I have twice been unable to copy & paste my question to the council into the online form, which means this form is inaccessible for users of assistive technology, and the website does not contain an accessibility statement. I have contacted the helpdesk regarding this matter and was told I needed to type my question onto the online form, however if I was using a speech to text device, this would not have been possible. Therefore I find that people with disabilities are being discriminated in their access to the www.democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk website. When will the council bring the site in line with The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for your question. Our web team has tested our 'Submit a public question' form and has successfully copied and pasted text into the form so cannot identify with the issue raised.

With regard to the [council's accessibility statement](#), this is available on our main website Cheltenham.gov.uk and you'll find links to it in the website header and footer. We thank you for highlighting that it is not apparent on www.democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk, so we'll look at improving this as a priority.

Our web team is currently working with an external organisation called The Shaw Trust, who are experts in the field of accessibility, to bring our website in line with the accessibility legislation. This work is nearing completion, but work to improve accessibility will always be ongoing. We have recently produced an accessibility policy, which is aimed at ensuring the continued improvement of our online platforms.

Supplementary question from Dr Cook to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

I am pleased to hear that the council has recognised that its accessibility statement is not apparent on this site, thank you for promising to amend this. I found the process of asking public questions to be challenging, as the online form did not ask about specific needs or requirements, and did not provide a map telling me where to come to the meeting. When I arrived here today, there was a tiny sign for the wheelchair accessible entrance, and the door in the corridor was locked. Once you are in the building, there is no signage to indicate a wheelchair accessible route, and if you had difficulty climbing the stairs to reach the public gallery there was no signage to indicate another route. Will all councillors uphold democracy by making coming to meetings more accessible?

Response from Cabinet Member

The public questioner left the Chamber before a response could be given.

One Member added as a point of information that members of the public could also email their questions directly to democratic.services@cheltenham.gov.uk, which might be more amenable to assistive technology than the online form.

Another Member added that the Accessibility Forum advised the council on these matters, so it would be helpful if Dr Cook's questions were referred to them.

8 Member Questions

1. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Due to the voter ID requirements set to be implemented from May 2023, and dealing with this on top of existing low voter turnout in many wards in Cheltenham, do we have a voter engagement plan in place to encourage people to vote and support them in voting?

Response from Cabinet Member

The Elections Act received Royal Assent in April 2022. Laying of the voter identification Statutory Instrument occurred on 6 November 2022 with it expected to come into effect by mid-January 2023 in readiness for the 4th of May 2023 elections. We currently do not have any elections planned for May 2023 in Cheltenham, somewhat of a blessing one may say, as the information and timetable for such a fundamental change in our voting system is somewhat condensed. We do have a draft engagement plan in place, but this may be subject to additions and changes.

2. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Since the range of voter ID options are very restrictive for those on a lower income or from a younger demographic, with railcards or students cards not being considered valid ID and thus excluding them from the voting process, how will we publicise postal voting or special registration forms as an alternative for those who may not be able to bring the right form of ID to the polling station?

Response from Cabinet Member

You mention the restrictive nature of the ID options chosen by the government, and I have to agree that currently they will have a significantly detrimental effect for younger residents and those on lower incomes. There will be a national awareness campaign starting on 8 January. We are still waiting for the Electoral Commission to provide us with resources to reflect the key message of the mass advertising campaign. We have a draft Voter ID engagement plan that, through various mediums includes using social media, our website, CBH newsletter and website, provide leaflets to community groups, hold surgeries for electors to apply for Voter ID Certificate. This is not an exhaustive list of activities for engagement.

So in the period before the 2023 May elections we can maximise the key messages for the benefit of our residents.

As I have mentioned in my answer to your previous question we do not have elections planned during 2023, this will give Cheltenham an opportunity to evaluate the impact of this engagement campaign, and its effect in areas that do have election in May 2023, its impact and how our residents responded will prove beneficial. Equally being able to understand the impact of the new voter ID process, the positive and negatives should again be beneficial in our planned elections in 2024.

3. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Affairs, Councillor Martin Horwood

It appears that Gloucestershire County Council are extending the ZWings electric scooter trial in Cheltenham until May 2024. Does Cheltenham Borough Council have an official stance on this, what is our position, and how has this been communicated to Gloucestershire County Council?

Response from Cabinet Member

The scooter trial is part of a national initiative across 31 English regions and is being operated by the Department for Transport (DfT) and Active Travel England. Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is overseeing the scheme in Cheltenham.

DfT announced in July that local authorities would have the option of carrying on with the trials up until May 2024.

The scheme was intended to support a 'green' restart of local travel and to help mitigate reduced public transport capacity as a result of the pandemic. In July 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) made regulations allowing trials of rental e-scooters to be fast tracked and expanded.

Further details of the scheme which GCC successfully applied to take part in and how it has been extended to date are available via the following link:

[Government e-scooter trials guidance for local areas and rental operators](#)

Safety concerns regarding the scooters have been raised at the CBC Accessibility Forum, by members of the visually impaired community. Officers are currently seeking information from GCC about the number of reports of misuse, including any data on those e-scooters that are licensed as part of the trial and private ones which are not.

In relation to transport more generally, CBC has encouraged GCC to be more ambitious in relation to its local plans and commissioned a report from consultants Systra, entitled 'Connecting Cheltenham' to inform our comments to GCC about what we would like to see in the Local Transport Plan. Whilst e-scooters are not specifically referenced in the report, we are supportive of a significant shift towards more sustainable transport modes, together with an emphasis on the infrastructure needed to support that shift.

Further details of the Connecting Cheltenham report can be found here:

[What is Connecting Cheltenham?](#)

4. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Affairs, Councillor Martin Horwood

Cheltenham has several heritage neighbourhoods, and while their management and upkeep is demanding for their unique profile, there are many residents who wish to install solar arrays to generate sustainable energy. Are there plans for Cheltenham Borough Council to relax planning rules and regulations to allow listed buildings to have reasonable and workable adjustments to add solar panels without a practical way forward?

Response from Cabinet Member

Both the National Planning Policy Framework and our own Cheltenham policy are quite clear: we encourage solar panels in pursuit of our climate change objectives and solar panels can be put on listed buildings and on buildings in heritage designated areas like the Cheltenham Conservation Area. But obviously this has to be done with care and in compliance with the rules still in force for heritage buildings. We can't relax national rules unilaterally. One of the best examples of imaginative flexibility to this issue in the whole country is the Grade II* listed church which is now Trinity Cheltenham but which was built in 1820 and modified by Cheltenham's most famous architect John Middleton. The church's new solar array was not only approved by Cheltenham Borough Council but we helped to fund them too through the Cheltenham Zero Community Fund launched by Cllr Wilkinson.

Our planning process has to take into account key issues of focus for Cheltenham such as heritage and the environment but these should not be in competition.

To promote sustainable energy the Council adopted the Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document earlier this year and through our application processes officers are encouraging all residents and homeowners to consider measures which will have a positive impact in tackling the climate crisis and include these in their proposals.

We must also recognise that our heritage is an important part of what makes Cheltenham a special place and we must take care to protect this. Applications for renewables, including solar panels, have to be carefully considered to ensure they sustain and enhance the special interest of listed buildings in line with national legislation surrounding listed buildings, which has not changed. Historic England have produced a range of guidance notes on renewable energy installations and recommending that a 'whole building approach' be taken to improve energy efficiency and provide the best possible balance to be struck between saving energy and reducing carbon emissions, sustaining heritage significance, and maintaining a healthy building. Links to these documents can be found via our website pages at [Working with listed buildings and within conservation areas | Energy efficiency, renewables and our built cultural heritage | Cheltenham Borough Council](#).

The Trinity example shows what can be done within these rules. We want a town that is beautiful, historic and green.

Our local planning policy is set out in our Cheltenham Plan adopted in 2020. In line with statutory requirements we are required to review this every five years and we will of course take the opportunity of the forthcoming review to see if we can strengthen even more our approach to tackling not just the climate crisis but the crisis in the natural world and pollution too. I want us to be one of the country's leading councils on climate action, biodiversity and a true recovery.

In terms of individual applications it is worth noting that each case must be treated on its own merits so while there is no relaxation in the requirement for listed building consent or

planning permission for works that affect listed buildings our officers must consider our other policies too, consider all options available and take a 'whole building approach'. For those wishing to seek new installations we offer a pre-application advice service which includes a heritage survey and full details of this can be found on our website at [Planning pre-application advice | Cheltenham Borough Council](#).

5. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling & Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

Some meetings ago I asked if the Cabinet Member would meet me on site to discuss how the Children's Play Area in Rowena Cade Avenue could be upgraded . Can update me on any progress and if he will agree to meet

Response from Cabinet Member

Yes, I am still willing to meet you at the Rowena Cade play area with a member of the Council's Green Space Team to discuss how the play area can be improved, and how it might be funded. We anticipate there might be some funding available from the Council's rolling annual play area improvement programme in 2023/24. I understand you are looking at external sources of funding with local residents, and that the green space team have suggested a new piece of equipment. Please feel free to contact me at any time to set this up.

6. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Will there be more active promotion of democratic engagement with Council, Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, so that members of the public are better informed of the work these meetings do, as well as their right to ask questions and interact in those meetings with their elected representatives?

Response from the Leader

Thank you for highlighting an important topic. The council looks to educate the public about how it can get involved in its decision making and social media is used to flag upcoming public meetings of Cabinet and Council.

The [Get Involved page](#) on the CBC website functions as a useful directory for residents looking to engage with the democratic process, signposting them towards how to attend public meetings, ask questions, speak at regulatory committees, respond to consultations and submit petitions.

The Democratic Services team aim to make the relevant information accessible and understandable for members of the public. All public meetings are now livestreamed to the council's YouTube channel and those who wish to view the meetings in person can come to the Municipal Offices to do so.

In addition to this, our communications team works hard to share key topics of debate and decisions, especially around high profile issues and consultations, with the local media, residents, partners, businesses and community groups. They proactively and reactively manage this through the press, the council's website and a variety of online social media platforms.

Councillors also have a key role to play in raising awareness within their ward of the ways in which constituents can get involved, and alerting residents and community groups to steps in the process where they have a particular role to play.

Of course if Councillor Joy has ideas of how she thinks more could be done I am very happy to hear them, in addition perhaps she would like to request her Green Party MP raise this with the education department in parliament. As we all know engaging at a young age and providing democratic education in schools would be of huge benefit and was something that used to happen.

7. Question from Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson

At the last Council Meeting, in response to a couple of public questions, and my question about lack of Tourist Information in the town, we were advised that Tourism information“is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town. Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what’s on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.”

I appreciate this may well be the intention, and assurances were given to this end, however, as of Friday 2nd December there was still no Tourist Information available in Reception nor any sign of the other facilities listed above.

Please would the Cabinet Member advise detail of what will be provided and, most importantly, when?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you to Cllr Nelson for this question. Following something of a false start, I’m pleased to say that a stand with tourist information is now located in the Municipal Offices reception. Additionally, we have a digital display screen giving tourism information. Anyone without access to a mobile phone who wishes to make subsequent enquiries during their visit, is able to use the booths in reception, which now include lists of useful numbers.

8. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

I was disturbed to read the report in local press recently (Gloucestershire Live / Echo November 24th p8) concerning insect infestation of a CBH owned property. It seems CBH response was not as prompt, robust or effective as it should have been and officers were not as supportive to the resident as they could have been.

What processes and procedures are in place to ensure similar occurrences, where accommodation becomes uninhabitable (whether through insect infestation, damp, mould or other issues), are dealt with promptly and sensitively. What are the lessons to be learnt from this recent case?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you Councillor Nelson for bringing this to my attention however I am can confirm after liaising with the Head of Community Services at Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) that they did respond promptly, robustly and effectively and were supportive to all residents impacted by the infestation.

Cheltenham Borough Homes have provided the following response which I trust you find is supportive of my comments above:

Following the passing of the tenant in Edward Wilson House, a fly infestation issue developed (due to the hot weather) and this impacted three flats below this property. There was no delay in CBH's response to this issue. CBH arranged for pest control services to visit the property, the same day as we were made aware of the issue. CBH were aware of the issue on 19th August 2022 and had resolved the infestation issue by 25th August 2022.

The tenants of all three flats impacted by the infestation were offered alternative accommodation. Two tenants chose to remain in the flats while treatment was undertaken. The third tenant (the complainant) had pre-arranged plans to be away from her flat for the weekend and did not initially accept the offer of alternative accommodation.

CBH officers attended the properties, out of hours (at the weekend) to check the outcome of the pest control treatment. The pest control treatment had not delivered a satisfactory outcome at the complainants flat over the weekend; therefore, she was immediately accommodated in a hotel, CBH covered the cost of the hotel and reimbursed her for expenses.

A further pest control treatment was undertaken, the complainant stated that she was still not happy to return to the flat. CBH arranged for another private contractor to carry out a further pest control plus a deep clean of the flat. Four pest control treatments in total were carried out at the complainants flat. The property was inspected, and the complainant advised that there were no flies present in the flat and that it was ready to be reoccupied.

Current position

- The complainant has stated that she wishes to be rehoused, and has been supported to make a Homeseeker application.

Summary:

- CBH were prompt (responded the same day), robust (in arranging 4 pest control treatments within a week) and were effective in resolving the infestation issue. Photographs have been taken of the complainant's flat post infestation treatment as evidence of the success of the infestation treatment.
- CBH were supportive to all three tenants affected by immediately offering alternative accommodation, subsequently providing alternative accommodation to the complainant and covering expenses. CBH officers went the extra mile in checking the properties at the weekend to establish the success of the treatment.
- CBH have ensured that the complainant is fully aware of the complaint process. To date, CBH have not received a complaint. The complaint communicated her viewpoint via the media and CBH have responded to this media enquiry.

9. Question from Councillor Matt Babbage to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood

What is Cheltenham's latest five-year housing supply assessment?

Response from Cabinet Member

The need for local planning authorities to constantly demonstrate a rolling five-year supply of housing, even when they have planned for all local housing need and more as Cheltenham has, is an onerous and often impossible test imposed on planning authorities by central government which has undermined their ability to deliver a plan-led system. The government has announced its intention to remove this requirement, providing the local authority has an up to date local plan in place, alongside the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill currently before Parliament and the Secretary of State confirmed this in his statement to the House of Commons on 6 December 2022.

The Council's most recent published [five-year housing land supply position statement \(1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020\)](#) sets out that the five year housing land supply calculation was that Cheltenham could only demonstrate a 3.9 year supply of housing land, largely due to the challenges in bringing forward the major strategic developments west and north-west of Cheltenham on which the town is heavily reliant for its demonstration of a five year supply.

The Council is in the process of updating the five year housing supply assessment (up to 31st March 2022) and are intending to publish this information during January 2023. Of relevance here is that the supply will remain below the 5 years supply which is a position not unique to Cheltenham and local planning authorities across England are in a similar position.

Cheltenham Borough Council is also actively involved in the delivery of housing development above and beyond the planning system to cater for the needs of our community and to accelerate the delivery of much needed housing. 'Live' examples of that involvement include:

- Acquisition of land by Cheltenham Borough Council in West Cheltenham, [driving the Golden Valley Development](#). By working in collaboration with adjacent landowners, the West Cheltenham strategic allocation has the capacity to deliver a minimum of 1,100 homes. This has included preparation of a strategic masterplan for the wider West Cheltenham strategic allocation developed in collaboration with Tewkesbury Borough Council and approved as a Supplementary Planning Document which sets out a strategic framework for the delivery of thousands of new homes, including affordable housing and diverse living options, jobs and infrastructure.
- Active engagement with the North West Cheltenham developer consortium (Elms Park) to support the delivery of over 4,000 new homes through progression of outline application and detail of the first delivery phase.
- Full Council approval of £180m investment in affordable and private market rental stock in the borough.
- New affordable housing stock being delivered through Cheltenham Borough Homes.
- Ongoing property asset assessment to enable the release of council assets for housing development and regeneration.
- Empty shops assessment underway in collaboration with the [Vacant Shops Academy](#) and the Cheltenham BID which includes proactive engagement with the landlords and operators within the town centre to assess the opportunity of changes of use to residential.

9 Treasury Mid-Term Report 2022/23

The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration introduced the report, which set out the council's treasury management activities up to September 2022. The global economy had changed significantly since the strategy was agreed, and the economic volatility that

began in early 2022 had continued during the first six months of the financial year. This had been compounded by the additional volatility created in our domestic financial market by political turbulence in Westminster.

The report provided details of the outturn position for treasury activities for the first six months of this financial year, and highlighted compliance with the council's policies previously approved by members in March 2022. The outturn forecast for this financial year at the time of the report being produced was that the General Fund would be in a deficit position against the budget of over £134,000, after the HRA had made its contribution for debt and received its share of investment income.

However, since September, and with a jump in interest rates and some additional interest due, the estimated outturn had now changed favourably, with a deficit of £35,000 now predicted. This would be updated accordingly for the 2022/23 revised budget. He added that all treasury management activities undertaken during the first six months of 2022/23 complied fully with the CIPFA Code of Practice and the Authority's approved Treasury Management Strategy.

He thanked the Treasury Management Panel for providing an effective layer of additional oversight, and the finance team for their work throughout a busy year, and commended the report to Members.

The Mayor moved into Member questions:

- One Member asked whether, with further increases in interest rates expected, this was being factored into the council's calculations regarding projects like its major housing commitments. The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration assured them that they were receiving constant advice on this, though it would be challenging going forward.

The Mayor moved into debate, where Members made the following points:

- The table on page 42 of the reports pack, which outlined the income return on investments for all 121 Arlingclose clients, highlighted the sterling job that the finance team had done.
- It was clear from sitting on the Treasury Management Panel that the finance officers were diligent and especially careful about who they were lending to.
- Managing financial affairs during a time of economic crisis was difficult, especially when they were very limited in terms of what they could do to increase revenue.
- It was good to see that the council was mindful of divesting from its investments in fossil fuels as soon as possible.

The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration thanked councillors for their comments.

The Mayor moved to the vote, it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The contents of this summary report of the treasury management activity during the first six months of 2022/23 be noted.**

FOR: 37

AGAINST: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

10 Local Council Tax Support Scheme

The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration introduced the report, noting that since 2013, the council had been required to set its annual 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. Funding for this scheme was rolled into the Revenue Support Grant and subject to annual cuts, but as the council no longer received this it needed to fund its share of the cost of the scheme itself.

In 2019/20, they approved a new scheme, with one of the main aims being to ensure that the most vulnerable and those with the lowest incomes continued to receive 100% support. The proposed council tax support scheme from 1st April 2023 for working age people would continue to be 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 increased.

Due to the impact of Covid, the caseload for working age people had increased significantly in 2020/21, and was up by 25% in April 2021. From the 1st March 2020, there were 3,984 recipients totalling £3.3million, and by April 2021 this 25% rise had taken the numbers up to 4,988 recipients totalling £4.7million. By October 2021, there had been a slight reduction in these numbers, to 4,839 recipients totalling £4.5million. As of October 2022, there were 4,643 residents totalling £4.2million of support.

Despite the increase in the number of working age residents requiring assistance compared to pre-pandemic levels, they continued to provide 100% support to the most vulnerable and those with the lowest incomes. Many residents were still recovering financially from the effects of the pandemic, in addition to the cost-of-living emergency, and this scheme would provide some vital help for the most financially vulnerable residents.

He drew colleagues' attention to the fourth recommendation, which took into account the fact that the government had not yet made up its mind as to what support it planned to give to residents receiving welfare benefits. The delegation in the recommendation allowed the council to make the relevant changes when this became clear.

He thanked officers working in Revenues and Benefits for the extraordinary work they put in to support residents in the town, and commended the report to Members.

The Mayor moved into Member questions:

- One Member asked what proportion of the £4.2m funding mentioned in the report went to the council, and how this compared to the county and the police. The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration did not have the figures to hand but agreed to provide a written response after the meeting.

The Mayor moved into debate, where Members made the following points:

- It was good to see that council was continuing to choose to provide 100% council relief to the families most in need.

- The number of people needing support had grown by more than 20% during the pandemic, and of all the individuals receiving relief, some 3,000 (70%) were receiving 100% support.

The Cabinet Member Finance, Assets and Regeneration thanked colleagues for their contributions. The council could not solve this crisis on their own, but these little bits of support made a huge difference.

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

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 for working age customers in Appendix 4 and summarised in Appendix 5 be approved;**
2. **Authority be given to the Executive Director for Finance Assets and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets and Regeneration to uprate any premiums, allowances and determine the income levels in line with any increase in Welfare Benefits by 20 February 2023.**

FOR: 37

AGAINST: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

11 Review of the Constitution

The Leader introduced the report, explaining that the constitution was the council's overarching rulebook, and was a living document that needed to be fit for purpose. The changes outlined in the report had been recommended to Council by the cross-party Constitution Working Group.

The Mayor moved into Member questions:

- One Member asked whether public and member questions and their written answers could automatically be taken as read, as it was not a good use of time to read out a full question and answer that had already been circulated. The Leader was happy to take this to the next CWG, though she was not sure it could be done in practice. Being a democratically accountable body meant that any member of the public had the right to ask questions.
- One Member asked whether there was a process in place to report back on how the measures were working. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was part of the Constitution Working Group.

The Mayor moved into debate, where Members made the following points:

- They had once passed out during a councillor's memorial service where attendees had been required to remain standing, and later found out that they had a medical condition which caused discomfort and difficulty in thinking clearly while standing. With that in mind, the removal of requirement for Members to stand whilst speaking at Council meetings was welcome, as there were many reasons why someone might want to remain seated, and should not have to ask permission or apologise for this.

However, the phrase ‘for the purposes of inclusivity’ was needless and discriminatory language that would make Members who chose to sit down seem different, and place an expectation on them to stand.

- It would be more accessible if Members remained seated when addressing the meeting, as they did for all other committees, as they were then closer to their microphones and more easily picked up by the live stream. The Leader responded that freedom of choice was important, noting that she suffered from backache when she leant over the microphone.
- The changes to notice arrangements around Member questions and reduced speech lengths in Council meetings were undemocratic, and reduced the opportunity to scrutinise and hold decision-makers to account. At the moment, Members had the weekend after the agenda and reports were published to submit questions, but this would no longer be the case.
- Having access to reports before the questions deadline was better for scrutiny and accountability, but trying out different deadlines and notice periods to see what worked best was wise.
- Extending the notice period for questions was counterintuitive, as they should be making it easier to ask questions rather than harder. Administrative convenience was being prioritised over democracy.
- Accompanying reports for motions would be appreciated.
- At Planning Committee, councillors were allowed 5 minutes to speak while members of the public had just 3. There ought to be parity, whether it became 5 for everyone or 3 for everyone. The Leader agreed that parity between Members and the public would be reasonable.
- Time was not the only consideration, as substance mattered too. The reduction of time for general debate made sense, as proposers and seconds of motions would still have 10 minutes to cover the key issues before other Members made their contributions.
- While some topics needed more time for discussion, in these cases the standing orders could be waived, as they had been before at budget meetings.
- The reason Members were asked to stand at Council meetings in the past was because of the presence of the Mayor and the mace, and to enable Members to project their voices before there were microphones in the room.
- The county council had a number of different deadlines for questions, both before and after the publication of papers, and allowed for the deadline to be extended if a report was unavoidably delayed. This flexible approach was worth considering here. The Leader noted that while the county’s process was more flexible, the time allocated to questions at meetings was strictly limited.
- The removal of the requirement to stand was welcome, and Members did not necessarily need to be disabled to benefit from this.
- The process of supplementary questions allowed councillors and members of the public to follow up if the situation had changed since their original question was submitted.
- In most cases, 3 minutes was more than enough time to make a point.
- Within the Planning process, the officer report was published for residents to read before additional representations were received. Members of the public needed to be able to ask questions about what was on the agenda, and they could not do that until it was published.
- The proposed new rules on Member questions compared favourably on grounds of transparency and accountability to those at other authorities, namely Brighton.

The Leader thanked Members for their contributions, and noted that the Mayor generally allowed councillors to exceed their allotted time as long as it was necessary to get their point across. Flexibility was key, and it enhanced the democratic process when Members needed to be succinct and clear. She finally emphasised that the recommendations came from a cross-party working group, and if any of them did not work then they would go back to it. There was always more they could do to make the constitution more efficient.

One Member asked for a recorded vote, which the requisite number of Members supported.

The Mayor moved to the vote, where it was:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The time limit for submitting Motions be increased from 5 working days to 7 working days;**
2. **The time limit for submitting member and public questions to Council, Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be increased from 5 working days to 7 working days;**
3. **The time permitted for speeches in general debate be reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes;**
4. **For the purposes of inclusivity, Clause 13.2 of the Council Procedure Rules (the need to stand to address the meeting) be updated to enable Members to either stand or remain seated when addressing the meeting;**
5. **Authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make the consequential amendments to the Constitution.**

FOR (31): Cllrs. Andrews, Atherstone, Baker, Bamford, Bassett-Smith, Beale, Britter, Chelin, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Fifield, Fisher, Harvey, Hay, Holliday, Horwood, Jeffries, Lewis, McCloskey, Payne, Pineger, Sankey, Savage, Tailford, Tooke, Wheeler, Wilkinson, Williams, Willingham

AGAINST (6): Cllrs. Babbage, Flynn, Harman, Joy, Nelson, Seacome

ABSTAIN (0)

12 Member Code of Conduct

The Leader introduced the report, which sought to ensure that the Code of Conduct remained up to date and aligned with best practice. The Code needed to be fit for purpose, and from a transparency point of view it was important to ensure that the public were not confused by differences between one authority and another across the county. In order to avoid this, the group of Monitoring Officers for the Gloucestershire councils had been involved in discussing and drafting a proposed unified Member Code of Conduct, taking into account the LGA model and their experiences of operating the present Codes in the individual Councils.

She added that the Code was now at a stage where councils had been actively consulting upon it and were moving towards adoption. There were a number of benefits of having a unified code, including Members sitting on more than one council having one consistent set of rules. She was aware of this from a personal point of view, as her husband was a county councillor and the differences in CBC and GCC's constitutions were clear. The Code had been considered by the Standards Committee on 4th August and the Constitution Working Group on 14th October, both of whom agreed to recommend it to Council.

The Mayor moved into Member questions:

- One Member noted that the Code was only as good as those who oversaw its implementation, and asked whether there was mandatory training for Standards Committee members. The Leader confirmed that there was, in addition to the training provided to the two Independent Members who sat on Standards.
- One Member asked when exactly the Code applied to councillors' conduct. The Leader clarified that the Code applied whenever they were acting in their role as a councillor, due to their role as public figures and their responsibility to represent their constituents.

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

RESOLVED THAT:

The Member Code of Conduct be adopted with effect from 1 January 2023.

FOR: 36

AGAINST: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

13 Overview and Scrutiny Referral - Council motion on UNICEF child-friendly city status and No Child Left Behind (18th July)

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, Cllr. Payne, introduced the report, which digested the O&S response to the referral from Council on 18th July. He explained that having been requested by Council to investigate the UNICEF child-friendly city offer and how it compared to No Child Left Behind's present work, the committee had considered a report from Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships) outlining the different possible approaches.

He noted that it was an unusual request of O&S, and all in his time on the committee he could not recall it being asked before to adjudicate on a motion. The committee had asked a wide range of questions about the various schemes and ultimately put forward two recommendations. The first of these concerned No Child Left Behind, and he thanked Cllr. Clucas and the council's many partners for making this possible. NCLB focused on a very specific group (children living in deprivation in Cheltenham) and fulfilled a sound and important function, so the O&S recommendation was to ring-fence it. He clarified that this meant it should not be constrained, but rather should develop from within, led by experienced partners who understood the job. He was keen to ensure that its impact, organisation and governance were not diluted by another scheme.

He continued by saying that in an ideal world, with greater resources available, the UNICEF scheme would be a welcome addition, especially in terms of giving children and young people a say in the direction of government. However, this was a 3-5 year program, and we did not have the resources to do that at the moment. A change in policy direction was needed at a higher level, and this would be better progressed on a county-wide basis. The situation was changing, and he hoped they could take a more open approach now.

Engaging with the county council would enable us to assess their appetite for delivering this scheme. He hoped Members would support the recommendations, which would ensure that both systems remained alive, and the council could potentially pursue the UNICEF system in the future.

The Mayor moved into debate, where Members made the following points:

- The request for county council involvement was suitable, as CBC had done its bit and now needed the county to step up too.
- O&S deserved thanks for taking such a detailed look at the issue, as did Cllr. Clucas for her amendment back in July that sent it to them. UNICEF was undoubtedly a recognised global brand, and it would be good to take this to the county council with their increased scope and platform.
- Cllr. Clucas and the officers involved deserved thanks for their work on NCLB, which worked very hard for the town. Hopefully the Members who also sat on the county council could work together to bring forward a motion on the UNICEF child-friendly approach at the county level.
- The county would soon be hiring a new Executive Director of Children's Services, and whoever this was could be contacted to see if they could spearhead this.
- NCLB had done great work in addressing poverty and inequality in the town, especially during the pandemic. The Cheltenham Offer, which sought to close the education gap in the town, had then become the Community Agreement and an impressive vehicle for change. Next year's NCLB awards would be a great event.
- The report had made clear that NCLB and UNICEF child-friendly status were two different mechanisms with different outcomes. The UNICEF status addressed the needs and rights of all children, and what was missing in Cheltenham was a strategy for meaningful consultation with children, like what had been seen recently with the climate emergency. There needed to be evidence of how this was fed into the final policy, in order to keep young people engaged. NCLB was an organic thing which was growing and adapting to challenges, and a clear strategy for consultation would be needed rather than anything ad-hoc. Proposals for a youth council would also ensure that young people's voices were heard.
- NCLB was unique, and that nowhere else in the country was doing what it did. It was a huge collective effort from individuals, organisations, groups and communities, and the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce was now an active supporter of the next stage. It was good that the UNICEF proposal would go to the county for consideration, and that NCLB would be ring-fenced. Tracy Brown, Richard Gibson, Jen Tucker and all those who helped make it possible deserved thanks.

The Chair of O&S thanked Members for their positive responses, and agreed with the suggestion that a motion also be raised with the county council. He agreed that there was not currently a mechanism for young people to influence what the council did, and this needed to be addressed if they wished to implement the UNICEF scheme. It was key that young people felt engaged.

The Mayor moved to the vote, where it was:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted;**

2. No Child Left Behind be ring-fenced, and not changed or diluted by pursuit of the UNICEF child-friendly approach;
3. An application not be pursued to join the UNICEF initiative, and that the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny write to the County Council to establish whether a cross-county approach can be developed with relation to the child-friendly framework, including greater involvement of children in the decisions that affect them.

FOR: 36

AGAINST: 0

ABSTAIN: 1

14 Notices of Motion

Motion A

Proposed by Cllr. Flynn; seconded by Cllr. Joy

Free school meals for all primary school children in England

4 million children are living in poverty in the UK.

For many children, living in poverty can mean going to school hungry, sleeping in a cold bedroom, and feeling worried and anxious about the stress at home. Poverty affects young people long into their future too - children growing up in poverty have significantly worse chances in life, poorer health and fewer opportunities.

Many professional education and health organisations, as well as individuals, are calling on the Government to extend Free School Meal provision including, but not limited to:

- Barnardo's - campaigning for Free School Meals for all Primary school children in England (they have a petition here <https://tinyurl.com/5dyp5hzv>) and have published a Cost of Living report which can be found here <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/impact-of-cost-of-living>
- The National Education Union - also calling for Free School Meals for all Primary School Children (<https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/food-insecurity-new-food-foundation-data>)
- The Food Foundation – advocating for an extension to the existing provision. They have an evidence pack that can be found here <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/superpowers-free-school-meals-evidence-pack> which cites research indicating that for every £1 invested, £1.38 would be returned, through social, health and educational benefits, resulting in £8.9bn in core benefits.

This Council notes:

- Free school meals for all primary-aged children would mean that every child would get at least one nutritious, healthy, filling meal a day, whatever they are facing at home.

- Around 800,000 children living in poverty are currently missing out on free school meals. Children in England are only eligible for free school meals if their families have net earnings below £7,400 per year.
- Free School Meals would relieve stress, anxiety for children at mealtimes, and relieve pressure for families living in poverty.
- Free school meals have been proven to reduce obesity and also to improve attendance and attainment rates at school.
- Scotland, Wales and some boroughs in London have already committed to extending universal free school meals to all primary children and are exploring options for expansion into secondary schools as well.

This Council calls on Cheltenham's Member of Parliament, Alex Chalk, to support the Free School Meals for All Bill, which will be tabled in Parliament on Tuesday 13 December.

In proposing the motion, Cllr. Flynn explained that it came about following a meeting of the Scrutiny Task Group on Tackling Multiple Deprivation which had focused on education, and heard from a local school where, despite over 90% of pupils living in poverty, only 55% were eligible for free school meals. Following some research on this, she spoke to Barnardo's about their free school meals campaign and liaised with the National Education Union. After submitting the motion, she was advised by the NEU that a bill on free school meals had been tabled in parliament for the day after this meeting (13th December), and adjusted the motion accordingly to request that the council call on Alex Chalk MP directly to support the bill. Both she and Cllr. Joy had also emailed him directly. If Council agreed this motion, he would be very aware of it tomorrow. Members were being asked to support something very straightforward and urgent, supported by Barnardo's, the NEU and the Food Foundation. The motion also expressed five concise reasons why this needed to happen.

In seconding the motion, Cllr. Joy described it as self-explanatory and urgent. There was a moral imperative to act ahead of the parliamentary debate tomorrow, and free school meals were a vital topic linked to other issues like youth engagement and individual autonomy. She was proud of everything that had been achieved through NCLB, and this looked to build on that and set an agenda for positive change.

Amendment to Motion B

Proposed by Cllr. Clucas; seconded by Cllr. Baker

Ask the Government to provide free school meals for all primary school children in England

4 million children are living in poverty in the UK.

For many children, living in poverty can mean going to school hungry, sleeping in a cold bedroom, and feeling worried and anxious about the stress at home. Poverty affects young people long into their future too - children growing up in poverty have significantly worse chances in life, poorer health and fewer opportunities.

Council acknowledges that providing food security for families across Cheltenham requires a wrap-around community support network and dedicated support to tackle associated forms of poverty such as fuel and after-cost-of-housing deprivation.

Primary schools providing free school meals to all students could play a vital role in this network.

Council recognizes the tireless work of community organizations in Cheltenham that already work to close the gaps and provide food to those most in need, including local food banks, youth groups, and places of worship.

This vital work should not be necessary - it is both a credit to our community and a consequence of our failing government.

Council instituted No Child Left Behind to fight the impact of poverty in Cheltenham, where we know from research done both in Cheltenham and by the End Poverty Alliance, that almost 5000 children in our town live in poverty.

NCLB, a unique alliance of Cheltenham residents and local organizations, has helped thousands of our fellow citizens who would otherwise suffer greatly from the effects of poverty.

Part of the work of No Child Left Behind is supporting the HAF (The Holiday Activity and Food programme), for those in reception to Year 11 who receive benefits-related free school meals. This scheme provides enriching activities and nutritious food to children across Cheltenham - but could and should go further to reach more children in need who aren't included in the current benefits programme.

The time has come for the government to recognise that denying children and families proper support results in children's educational attainment suffering, potential employment opportunities suffering, and, consequently, our economy suffering.

As such, Council resolves to:

- Commit to continued support for No Child Left Behind and the HAF scheme in Cheltenham.
- Back Layla Moran's campaign for all schools to guarantee food vouchers to families when schools are closed for holidays - which can be exchanged at a range of supermarkets to ensure inclusivity.
- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the two MPs representing Cheltenham, asking them to VOTE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS BILL in Parliament.
- Engage with Gloucestershire County Council, as the local authority responsible for the provision of free school meals, and advocate for:
 - The offer of free school meals to be extended to all primary school students.
 - School holiday food voucher schemes - to be better promoted, more accessible, and reach more families across town.
 - The HAF scheme to be opened up to more children and families who need it.

In proposing the amendment, Cllr. Clucas acknowledged an interest as a member of a teaching union and as the Vice-Chair of a multi-academy trust. Her amendment sought to highlight the number of people living in poverty in Cheltenham, which might seem from the outside to be a prosperous town. Behind that, however, there was a real and significant

problem that they could not tackle alone. The government needed to provide free school meals to every single child in the country without conditions or stigma. This would give children a good start to the day and ensure they did not feel hungry at school. Over time, they would see a major effect on their ability to learn and on their wider opportunities. It was estimated that it would cost £365m to provide free school meals for all primary schools each year, or £1bn a year for all schools. In comparison, the government had lost £4.9bn to fraud during Covid. This would be a transformational policy to make lives better, and there were more children than ever in need of support. She was looking forward to hearing members' suggestions about how they could achieve this and do things a better way.

In seconding the amendment, Cllr. Baker thanked Cllr. Flynn for proposing the original motion, and Cllr. Clucas for her amendment. 5,000 children were growing up in poverty, which was scandalous in a town like Cheltenham. As Cllr. Flynn had made clear, it was an urgent issue, with the bill being presented to parliament tomorrow, so they needed to email the MP rather than writing to him. He highlighted a clear provision gap in the current system, noting that at Naunton Park Primary School, only 17 of 600 pupils were eligible for free school meals because the threshold for it was far too low. He had spoken to teachers about the impact of free school meals, and they had reported a noticeable drop-off point in concentration among those who hadn't eaten. The seventh-richest country in the world should be providing free school meals as a basic minimum. He hoped that there would be cross-party support for the amended motion.

The Mayor asked whether the original motion's proposer accepted the amendments. Cllr. Flynn confirmed that she did not. She found it to be a different motion that should have been brought to Council in its own right rather than trying to supersede hers.

The Mayor moved into debate on the amendment, where Members made the following points:

- The amendment expanded on the initial motion rather than seeking to overrule it.
- Children coming into school hungry had severe consequences on both their learning and their health.
- It was a political choice on the part of the government not to solve this crisis, and a consequence of 12 years of Conservative government.
- A recent county council-published booklet about access to food and activities circulated to schools included a six page long list of food banks. The vital and tireless work of these organisations should not be necessary, and food banks should be a last resort.
- Free school meals were an investment in equality and in children's futures.
- The amendment didn't go far enough, considering that in Sweden, for example, three school lunches had been provided to all students aged up to 19 for decades. The UK was richer than Sweden and should be following their model.
- As part of Cheltenham borough was in another constituency, there was another MP who was worth contacting.
- During the pandemic, the government voted down a Labour motion to provide free school meals to all children. The MPs voting against it included those for Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham, while the other two in the county did not vote. The Leader's emails would likely fall on deaf ears.
- The preamble to the current Gloucestershire-wide food allocation strategy noted that 16 government departments had an interest in food banks, so it was no wonder nothing was happening to change the situation. The council needed to identify the parts of the system it could influence.

- The council was clearly willing to go above and beyond its statutory obligations. Creative ideas were needed to set the agenda and ensure this situation never happened again.
- The amendment stated that 'the time had come' for this move, but really it had always been needed.
- It was hard to underestimate the scale of the problem, when they were seeing police officers and nurses relying on food banks.
- It would prove a united front if all Members voted for the amended motion.

The Mayor moved to the vote on whether to accept the amendment:

FOR: 31

AGAINST: 1

ABSTAIN: 5

The amendment thus became the substantive motion.

The Mayor moved to the debate on the substantive motion, where Members made the following points:

- Motions brought by the Green group were continually hijacked by the Liberal Democrat group. The newly agreed amendment disregarded the work of Barnardo's, Food Foundation and National Education Union to solve this issue, and the points that replaced them could have been more suitably expressed in the member debate, while the reference to the government was not needed.
- Many of the new resolutions were already being done.
- Child poverty should not be treated as a political football, and political grandstanding would not feed any children.
- It would be easier to sort disputes like this out further in advance of the meeting.
- Cross-party support for the amended motion would send a powerful message.
- The issue under discussion concerned the future of every child in the country.
- A full stomach was a basic right, and it made children more content, able to learn and better behaved.

The Leader added as a point of information that she had the email ready in her inbox, and would sent it as soon as the motion was agreed.

One Member asked for a recorded vote, which the requisite number of Members supported.

The Mayor moved to the vote on the amended motion.

FOR (33): Cllrs. Andrews, Atherstone, Baker, Bamford, Bassett-Smith, Beale, Boyes, Britter, Chelin, Clark, Clucas, Collins, Dobie, Fisher, Flynn, Harvey, Hay, Holliday, Horwood, Jeffries, Joy, Lewis, McCloskey, Payne, Pineger, Sankey, Seacome, Tailford, Tooke, Wheeler, Wilkinson, Williams, Willingham

AGAINST (0)

ABSTAIN (4): Cllrs. Babbage, Fifield, Harman, Nelson

Motion B

Proposed by Cllr. Wilkinson; seconded by Cllr. Boyes

Voter ID proposals

Council notes with concern:

The Voter ID proposals, which are due to be enacted nationwide from 2023 and would apply to all elections in Cheltenham.

That people will be disenfranchised by this legislation, particularly those from certain groups, including less well-off families and younger people.

The bias in the proposals towards accepting forms of ID commonly held by certain demographic groups and against accepting forms of ID commonly held by others.

The lack of funding for councils administering elections to engage in awareness campaigns to prevent disenfranchisement of voters.

That the Gould Principle recommends electoral legislation should not be introduced within six months before a scheduled poll, but that unless an unscheduled election were to take place this would not apply to any election in Cheltenham.

That while the government is reportedly offering access to a Voter ID card to the 3.5million people without any form of photo identification, this still represents a barrier to voting for many.

Council further notes:

That in 2019, the most recent general election year, there was only one conviction for electoral fraud due to impersonation.

That the reported cost of administering Voter ID will be in the region of £180million, with some extra costs borne by local authorities already under significant financial pressure.

Council resolves to:

Ask the Chief Executive and/or Returning Officer to report to full council in March 2023 on this authority's proposals to minimise the risk of disenfranchisement.

Write to the appropriate Secretary of State and Cheltenham's Members of Parliament to:

- express concern about the upcoming changes with a suggestion they are scrapped**
- request that if Cheltenham's MPs are not minded to support the scrapping of the changes, propose an expansion of the range of forms of ID that will be accepted and request extra funding for local awareness campaigns**

In proposing the motion, Cllr. Wilkinson described the voter ID proposals in the forthcoming Elections Act as like using a Boeing 747 to go to the shop for a pint of milk, such was the disparity between the scale of the problem and the cost of the solution. You were more likely to meet a lottery winner than someone convicted for voter impersonation in the UK. The Act would not make votes count any more equally, contribute to democracy or make it easier to vote. It was a solution way out of alignment with the scale of the problem, especially considering the cost of living emergency and failure to deliver a basic level of services at the

moment. Even if one took a generous view of the government's intentions, it would not deliver value for money. It also offered fewer options for younger people than older people, meaning that young people were more in danger of losing their rights. It seemed as though the government were trying to prevent certain groups of people voting.

He summarised that the proposals needed to be dropped before people were disenfranchised at the next election, or at least that the current rules on accepted ID be extended. The council would step in to do what it could to prevent disenfranchisement, but Cheltenham's MPs needed to act now to prevent basic rights being infringed.

In seconding the motion, Cllr. Boyes highlighted the impact of the Elections Act on the democratic process. Councillors sat in the Chamber representing all citizens, some of whom would be prevented from voting by the Act, and protecting their access to voting was essential. Forcing voters to bring ID made it harder for people to vote, since the more disadvantaged someone was, the less likely they were to have ID. She highlighted that under the proposed new rules, someone could vote with a 60+ Oyster Card but not an 18+ one, and she had real concerns that it would disenfranchise young people. The UK did not issue citizens with national identity cards, and there were no free or low-cost options. Young and disadvantaged people would effectively be locked out of the polling station. Even senior Tories had described it as an illiberal solution. The Act was estimated to cost £180m in the first decade, even though widespread voter impersonation was not an issue in the UK, with only 33 cases investigated by police after the 2019 election.

There being no amendments proposed, the Mayor moved to the debate, where Members made the following points:

- Only four of the more than thirty members states of the OECD did not require voter ID, and one of those four was trialling it at the moment. Like it or not, we lived in an age where people had to prove their identity.
- The Elections Act was a disgusting piece of legislation which would fundamentally dilute democracy. It was bad legislation by design, putting barriers in front of voters.
- Through an FOI request, the Electoral Commission's warnings about the Act had been made public, making it clear that the 2023 election was being treated as an opportunity to learn rather than a vital exercise in democracy. Poorer people and younger people would have to jump through hoops to access a basic right, and it would be a nightmarish situation for our democracy.
- When speaking to constituents on the doorstep, there was a clear sense of disenfranchisement, particularly amongst young people and those who were struggling to get by. The government should be trying to alleviate people's concerns that their vote didn't count rather than making it worse.
- The proposed list of accepted IDs included an OAP bus pass but not a young person's railcard or student ID. ID was expensive, and this went against the principle of being able to vote as easily as possible. The Act seemed like voter suppression, straight out of the Republican playbook in the USA.
- It would be illiberal to require members of the public to carry their ID at all times, and getting them to pay out of pocket just to vote was ridiculous. Most forms of ID cost more than £20, which was equivalent to a week's worth of food. The policy was either incompetent or a very deliberate attempt to disenfranchise large groups of people. The UK could not be allowed to become a 'papers, please' society.
- UK elections were incredibly safe. You could go to a polling station that morning and see that the boxes are empty, watch them be sealed after polls close, and then go to the count and watch the votes being counted in front of you. There was no need for

this Act unless you wanted to disenfranchise people. It was clear that less affluent people, who the government know wouldn't vote for them, would lose out. This was not characteristic of a free and liberal society.

- These plans would reduce turnout at local elections, which was already as low as 24% in some cases, and there would be a point where the democratic mandate of those elected would be questioned.
- When travelling around Europe with a EU ID card, nobody demanded to see it, and it helped improve access to healthcare. Similar ID measures were in place in Italy, Austria and even Northern Ireland, and there had been no significant issues with it.
- Those who were struggling to get by would be restricted in terms of democratic participation.
- These proposals were part of a general shift to the right in our society, alongside restricting protest and strikes. The bill was rushed and would put barriers in front of young people and other groups.

Cllr. Wilkinson thanked Members for their contributions and again highlighted the key issues of democracy and political engagement.

The Mayor moved to the vote, where the motion was approved.

FOR: 31

AGAINST: 4

ABSTAIN: 1

15 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision

There were none.

16 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)

17 A Property Matter

The Leader of the Council introduced the report which had been circulated to Members as a late supplement to the published agenda.

For the benefit of Members who had joined more recently, she provided the background to the Minster project. Members then had the opportunity to ask questions and then debate the report.

RESOLVED THAT

- 1. the original business case was predicated on shipping container-based construction with a lifespan of 10 years.**
- 2. Council notes and approves the updated business plan for the MX recognising the longer lifespan of the building and extending the return on investment from 10 years to at least 25 years be approved.**
- 3. up to £2.560m in additional funding to complete construction be approved (see financial implications and section 5 of the report for detail).**
- 4. authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Executive Director Finance, Assets and Regeneration in consultation with the Leader, to negotiate an updated governance and joint venture for the operation of the MX building with Plexal and WSC Group to replace the previous arrangement with WSC Cheltenham.**
- 5. recommended governance for the project be presented by officers to Council for approval in February 2023.**

Voting- 29 in favour; 0 against; 3 abstentions