

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 2 April 2024

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.15 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Victoria Atherstone, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Martin Horwood and Alisha Lewis

Also in attendance:

Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Wilkinson.

2 Declarations of interest

As Honorary Club Secretary of the Cheltenham Tigers Rugby Club, who are mentioned several times in the report, the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income declared a non-pecuniary interest in, Agenda item 9.

3 Minutes of the last meetings

13 February 2024

The Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services made two corrections:

- he declared an interest in Agenda Item 8, not Item 7;
- Under Item 6, a statement in the first paragraph is misleading, relating to the delegation of powers. The minutes state "It will take the form of an examination" which appears to relate to the proposal in front of Cabinet; this isn't right. It should say "There will be an examination,..."

With these corrections, the minutes were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

23 February 2024

These minutes were approved by Members and signed by the Leader as a true record.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were none.

5 Cheltenham Ice Rink

In the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing's absence, the Leader read out his introduction, saying that the 2023-24 ice rink set new standards in the town and wider events industry, welcoming 31k visitors, bringing £1.6m to the local economy (including £860k additional spend as a result of the ice rink), creating new jobs and supporting others.

In addition, the council kept its pledge not to use diesel generators, using vegetable oil and battery-powered method instead, provided by a business based in Imperial Square. This reduced the carbon footprint by 98% compared with 2021, and is being shared as an example of best practice with other event organisers.

If approved by Cabinet, the planning committee will need to consider varying the condition on last year's permission to allow the use of this technology again, until electric power is installed in the Gardens. Cabinet is also asked to approve a financial commitment to this year's ice rink, and delegation of responsibility to officers charged with managing the project.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety thanked the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing and all those who made it possible for 600 children and young people who would otherwise have been excluded to share in this experience in 2023. She said the council runs the town for the benefit of the people, and hoped this would be repeated this year.

The Cabinet Member for Housing noted that there were no complaints from neighbours about noise from generators, which had been an issue in the past. She said the innovative technology really is a great step forward, resulting in a vast reduction in emissions.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the information about the outputs of the 2023-24 ice rink is noted;**
- 2. in advance of planning permission being considered by the Planning Committee and noting the costs and risks set out in this report, Cabinet**

approves that Cheltenham Borough Council leads the delivery of an ice rink in Cheltenham for the 2024-25 Christmas period;

3. Subject to planning permission, extension to the contract for delivery and management of the Christmas Ice Rink at Imperial Gardens, Cheltenham for 12 months is approved;
4. a total potential financial commitment as set out in section 4 of this report is approved;
5. Cabinet notes that officers are progressing procurement and delegates appointments of contractors to the Director of Communities and Economic Development, as per section 5 of this report.

6 Discretionary Business Rates Relief

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced his report, saying that the government's autumn statement confirmed that relief would continue. It was originally a Covid measure but a lot of businesses still need help – 600 of the 4,000 properties assessed for business rates in Cheltenham are entitled to assistance. He hoped that the long-awaited business rates review would materialise at some point soon.

The Cabinet Member for Housing commented that although it is great that this funding to support businesses is available, it is a huge shame that the businesses still need support and are not fully recovered from the last few years. She hoped that the support would continue for as long as it was needed.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief scheme 2024 as detailed in Appendix 2 is approved.
2. the Head of Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, is authorised to implement any changes to the reliefs detailed in appendix 2 as required by Government or to ensure the successful operation of the scheme.
3. Due to the volume of cases, decisions relating to the application of these reliefs are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and officers in the Business Rates team. In the case of a dispute reconsideration is to be made by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.

7 Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

Introducing his report, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said this scheme is for recipients of housing benefits or people on universal credit needing additional support. He said it doesn't represent a vast sum of money, and the council is fully compensated through the Department of Work and Pensions. The policy hasn't been updated since 2018, but there are no major changes.

The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for his report, saying she was shocked at the number of residents struggling with no-fault evictions and having to find alternative affordable accommodation in Cheltenham. Despite the first increase for many years in the local housing allowance, there doesn't appear to be a single property in Cheltenham that is covered by the new rate. Although grateful for the additional funding, she is concerned that it is not enough and her heart goes out to those struggling to find accommodation.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets shared her concerns, saying that the small amount of additional money was welcome, but also indicative of the broken system after decades of housing crisis.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy in Appendix 2 is approved**
- 2. decisions relating to the award of Discretionary Housing Payments, in line with the policy and DWP guidance, are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and designated officers within the Benefits team, with the final decision in the event of dispute being taken by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.**
- 3. the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer is authorised to apply to DLUHC for an accounting direction if it appears that the annual allocation will be exceeded in any financial year**

8 Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse Policy

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities introduced her report, which will be shared with key members of staff at the council, and with Councillors Chelin and Harman, who are advocates for safeguarding and domestic abuse. She said assistance will be available not only for staff but also for councillors should they need it, and gave assurance that any matter would be completely confidential under the terms of the policy.

The Leader commented on the importance of this type of policy, supporting staff and councillors, to ensure people feel safe and understand that the council won't tolerate this kind of behaviour.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Employee and Councillor Domestic Abuse policy is adopted.**

9 Physical Activity and Sports Strategy, Phase 2

On behalf of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, the Leader was happy to introduce his report on the long-awaited Physical Activity and Sports Strategy. She began by saying that sedentary lifestyles pose a huge threat to us all, not only on a personal and physical basis but also through many knock-on effects. The strategy will help the borough decide how to assist people to leave more active and healthy lives.

She said the strategy's phased approach started with a wide range of stakeholder groups defining their needs, then moved to a more technical assessment of facilities available, carried out by expert consultants. This showed that Cheltenham is generally well-served but there are specific pinch points such as all-weather pitches.

Looking at the larger municipal facilities, the long-term renewal of Leisure@ and the Prince of Wales Stadium will be part of the action plan – this will bring challenges, but also opportunities for new facilities and partnerships, not least because the Prince of Wales Stadium is a regional facility, not the sole responsibility for CBC.

The report demonstrates that cost is a barrier to many people's involvement in physical activity and sport, and also highlights the good work already done in partnership with others, such as the Feed Cheltenham Leisure Pass.

She ended by saying that the five recommendations cover a lot of ground, and set in train several major workstreams.

The Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial income made the following comments:

- Cheltenham Tigers Rugby Club is a wonderful and inclusive facility for everyone, but unfortunately, boys and girls have to form separate teams from the age of 11, resulting in many girls dropping out of the sport as there are not enough of them to make up teams;
- The newly-formed wheelchair team is doing well and has joined a national league, but sadly struggles to find venues to train and play in Cheltenham, the only option being at Balcarras School, which is indoors and has the right floor surface. We need to do more than we currently do to ensure sport is inclusive for everyone;
- The maps and charts in the report by Max Associates are very difficult to follow, particularly for anyone with a hidden disability. They are not respecting their own barriers and need to be more inclusive in this respect.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency said the strategy dovetails with the work of the climate team, and its focus on aspects of Cheltenham that everyone loves and wants to pass on to future generations. She said Leisure@ is expensive to run and high costs make entry unaffordable for many, but conversations are underway on how to retro-fit, make the site more sustainable, and keep costs down.

The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked everyone who had worked hard in producing such an insightful report. She noted with interest the references to developing relationships with schools to maximise every sporting space, but commented that halls with high ceilings are not needed for some activities such as yoga and Pilates – these activities could be located elsewhere, maximising the use of school sports facilities for activities which do require high ceilings. She also commented that more investment in pitches in North and West Cheltenham is needed, but was looking forward to the next stage of the strategy, this report having provided some excellent material to move forward.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets made the observation that, due to the local authority funding crisis, many towns around the country don't have any facilities or strategy, and regretted the disparity. He was, however, grateful for everything going on in Cheltenham, and in particular the free pass for families who can't afford to access the facilities. This opens the door to a healthier lifestyle, particularly welcome as many health outcomes are related to poverty. He thanked the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing and officers for the report.

The Leader welcomed the report and looked forward to the next stage of the journey, using the evidence gathered. She also looked forward to the redevelopment of Leisure@, remembering when it first opened as a flagship venue in 1972, and the opportunity to work with a range of partners.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 2. the findings and recommendations from the Max Associates' Built Leisure and Sports Facilities Report as set out in section 4 and attached as appendix 2 is noted**
- 3. the provisional findings and indicative recommendations from stage C of the Playing Pitch Assessment as set out in section 5 is noted**
- 4. the initial findings from the Physical Activity Survey as set out in section 7 is noted**
- 5. that a report will be brought back to Cabinet to agree and finalise the playing pitch strategy, along with the over-arching physical activity and sports strategy and accompanying action plan that will deliver the Council's vision and outcomes for physical activity and sports as set out in section 3 is noted**

6. consultants to undertake an options appraisal of the future provision of Leisure at Cheltenham and the Prince of Wales stadium to include indicative capital costs is commissioned.

10 Cotswolds Beechwood Mitigation Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services introduced the item as set out in his report, explaining the background and why mitigation measures were being introduced to protect the Cotswold Beechwoods, an extensive area of ancient beech woodland between Birdlip and Cranham. The strategy will take two approaches – Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) to encourage people to find other green places to go, and Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) to encourage councils to acquire new areas that can be made accessible as alternatives to the beechwoods.

The cost is quite steep – SAMM £193, SANGS £493, administration £125, totalling £798 per new dwelling – and applies to all new developments, whatever the size, but is significantly cheaper than the charges levied elsewhere.

The second part of the recommendation is for the development of a specific action plan to implement the policy in Cheltenham, looking at sites already owned or managed by CBC and raising awareness of less well-known green spaces in the borough.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets wholly supported the report, but was concerned that all the liability for funding to protect these areas will fall to the developer, in addition to the existing S106, CIL, highways, education and public art contributions, all of which are taken into consideration before affordable housing. He has flagged this as part of the Strategic and Local Plan consultation, and said the point will come when the council has to make some tough choices – we cannot keep putting the burden of supporting what we want to do on developers.

The Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services understood these concerns, and was surprised that the charges would extend to small developers, potentially incentivising them to build fewer, larger dwellings rather than much-needed affordable housing. He said he would ask planning officers to look into a Cheltenham-specific action plan, possibly with a charge per bedroom rather than per dwelling – we do not want a positive environmental impact to result in a negative social impact.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy is adopted**
- 2. Cabinet is committed to bringing forward a detailed action plan for Cheltenham borough that will look to utilise existing parks, gardens, public open spaces, accessible private green spaces and designated Local Green Spaces, including raising awareness of less well known spaces as well as considering new areas in each of**

these categories that may have the potential for enhanced public access and wherever possible deliver benefits for those communities most impacted by development and those with least access to nature in their neighbourhoods

11 UBICO Business Plan, 2024-25

The Leader introduced the report, saying Cheltenham is lucky in what Ubico delivers across the county, and also in its exciting plans for future growth and more recycling. It is the council's biggest contract, costing £10m a year, but does a fantastic job.

The Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services complimented Ubico for its outstanding record in pushing recycling to record levels and increasingly sophisticated approach to big issues, at the same time as quickly tackling localised problems – a testament to good management.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety also thanked and complimented Ubico for their excellent work. She said they recently helped a number of disabled residents in her ward who were having trouble sorting their recycling, and praised their recycling of food waste to buy food for food banks.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets commented on how much environmental services have changed over the years, and praised Ubico for their excellent work and level of service. He thanked management, but gave special thanks to the frontline operatives who are out working day in day out, whatever the weather.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services commented on the goodwill and can-do attitude of Ubico operatives, particularly in the face of recent challenges of extreme weather conditions and race week – they have shown themselves to be an innovative, well-led and reactive workforce. With their excellent management and exemplary service, it is no surprise that they go from strength to strength and are expanding geographically, and he thanked them from the bottom of his heart.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Ubico 2024/2025 Business Plan is noted;**
- 2. the Leader of the Council, as shareholder representative, will sign the written resolution to approve the Ubico 2024/2025 Business Plan in due course.**

12 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Cabinet Members to present any briefings.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services said work on the refurbishment of Montpellier Toilets had begun today, after two years of planning. This public service is discretionary, and the Changing Places facility will remove barriers and enhance the ability of residents and visitors to participate in what Cheltenham has to offer.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency was excited to report that the council is giving money to a number of businesses and organisations to retro-fit their properties to make them more environmentally friendly. There are many bold ideas from a wide range of businesses, and lessons learnt will be shared with others in due course.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reported that the 2021-22 accounts have finally been signed off – an important milestone in view of the national backlog.

The Leader reported an exciting visit to the MX, where she welcomed the press to showcase the project so far. She also met tenants, who can't wait to move in, and looked forward to the wider launch in the summer.

As it was the last meeting of Cabinet before the election, she thanked each and every Member for their contributions, saying she was proud of everything the LibDem administration was doing and delivering. She thanked officers, especially the Chief Executive for his support over the last two years, and all staff at CBC. She also thanked the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, who is standing down as a councillor, for his fantastic work – he will be much missed, and she wished him well for the future.

13 Cabinet Member decisions since the last meeting

The Leader invited Members to report on decisions taken since the last meeting of Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services reported two decisions for the purchase of recycling and refuse vehicles, previously agreed as part of the general update and refurbishment of the fleet. He confirmed that contracts were awarded assiduously and carefully to ensure the best value for money.

[Award of contract for refuse collection vehicles](#)

[To award a contract to Romaquip for two kerbside recycling vehicles](#)

He also reported the following appointment, as previously mentioned in his briefing:

[Appointment of Contractor for Montpellier Gardens Toilet Refurbishment](#)

As previously mentioned, the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency reported on the decision to award grants, following a very robust

process. She said there were many more applications than could be funded and making the decisions was tough, but she was happy with the outcomes.

[Cheltenham Zero Business Fund – Award of Grants](#)

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reported the following decision, to retrofit social housing

[To appoint Sero Life Ltd to deliver professional retrofit services](#)

The Leader said that the Deputy Chief Executive Director had come to the end of his tenure as Non-Executive Director of Ubico Ltd, and would be replaced in that role by the Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer. She said he had been well-respected and valued and was confident that the new appointee would be equally so.

[To appoint Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer as Non-Executive Director of Ubico Ltd](#)