

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 22 July 2024

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 3.25 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Paul Baker (Chair), Dr David Willingham (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Sandra Holliday, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Alisha Lewis, Cathal Lynch, Tony Oliver, Ben Orme, Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance and Customer Services and Monitoring Officer), Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive) and Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets and Deputy S151 Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, Atherstone, Beale, Chandler, Clark, Garcia Clamp, Mutton and Wheeler.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

Councillor Barrell said she declared an interest in Agenda Item 9, not Agenda Item 13 as stated in the draft minutes.

With this amendment, the minutes were approved unanimously and signed as a true record.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor began by sending condolences to the family and friends of former Councillor Andrew Chard who died recently. He remembered him as a charming and eloquent man, passionate about Cheltenham, who also served as a governor at Bettridge School and trustee of the Civic Society.

He went on to say how much he was enjoying his role as Mayor, and highlighted some of the excellent events he has recently attended:

- the opening of a new dentist's surgery in Leckhampton Road. Although this was a lovely occasion, he was shocked to hear about the state of dentistry in the county and the number of children admitted to hospital as a result of dental problems. The new surgery is proposing to engage with the local community in schools, providing advice on food and dental hygiene;
- Speech Day and a summer concert at Dean Close School. Education plays a huge part in the town, and schools like Dean Close are a great example, important to the local economy, employing 600 people, and interacting with other local schools and communities;
- a concert by Cheltenham Silver Band in Hatherley Park. He thanked the Friends of Hatherley Park and other similar groups for the important role they play in the town;
- the launch of Cheltenham Heritage Open Days at the Bowling Green in St George's Square, which is celebrating its 100th year. This was a great occasion which also launched the Public Art Trail, highlighting the many interesting features of the town, for both visitors and residents;
- the 450th anniversary of the Pates Alms Houses, another enjoyable event.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader shared the following communications:

- the general election had occupied a great deal of Members' time and efforts recently, and congratulations are due to Max Wilkinson on his election as Cheltenham's MP, as well as Cameron Thomas who has been elected in Tewkesbury. She looked forward to working with them and ensuring that the council does all it can to make sure they deliver on their priorities;
- thanks to Alex Chalk, who served the town well as MP for a decade; she wished him well for the future;
- the MX is now 75% occupied and will be officially opened on Wednesday;
- welcome former CBH staff to Team Cheltenham now that the TUPE process is complete;
- with the new government in place and moving at pace, she was happy to reassure Members that she and officers were working to respond to the changes and initiate dialogue from a Cheltenham and regional perspective, in particular in relation to the Golden Valley Development which is significant both nationally and internationally.

6 To receive petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

7 Public Questions

None had been received.

8 Member Questions

None had been received.

9 Financial Outturn 2023 - 2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report, which she said was a testament to the dedicated service of the previous portfolio holder who had steered the financial shift with common sense, and also to the incredible work of CBC's finance team. She highlighted the following headline issues:

- Golden Valley is the council's goal, widely support both as a revenue stream and investment opportunity, underpinning the future delivery of many vital frontline services, including jobs and homes; CBC is spending a lot of money on it, but for very good reasons;
- tough choices will have to be made as central government funding does not keep up with residents' needs. It isn't know whether the new government will make a difference, but CBC will continue its great record of finding creative opportunities to deliver the services that residents deserve. The report highlights how this is being done, as well as the new and exciting ways CBC is investing in the town;
- climate change remains a pressing issue, and all service delivery aims to reduce overheads and at the same time ensure sustainability for our future and the planet;
- the report shows that the council has clear priorities and is serious about the goals set out in the corporate plan. We are getting the basics right, and must work backwards from our key commercial and strategic objectives to ensure that these can be delivered sustainably. CBC will continue to invest in the town, not just for its bank account but also in the best interests of the people;
- it is clear that we need money in reserves, and the she and finance team are determined to ensure that it is in a strong position to face whatever the world throws at us.

She was happy to commend the report.

In response to a Members' questions, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that:

- she is often asked what CBC is doing differently from other councils to enable it to underspend and avoid the risk of bankruptcy, and considers this to be due to our strong commercial strategy and investment in Cheltenham. This allows CBC

to continue to deliver the frontline services we all know and love, such as No Child Left Behind;

- while many properties in the town are owned by other authorities, pension groups and other such organisations, she can confirm that CBC's investment in Cheltenham is for Cheltenham – we know the area and what the market demands, and not only create money for services, but also improve the town's buildings and keep retail in consistent use. This is not the approach taken by every council.

A Member spoke about the stories behind the figures, in particular the cost of cleaning up graffiti in the town. He said the council has no control over this, and there is also a cost in terms of wellbeing and civic pride. He considered that this type of anti-social behaviour should be dealt with by the police, noting that the OPCC takes 14% of our council tax, and wondered whether an estimate of the cost to the council could be provided and CBC could suggest, maybe via Overview and Scrutiny, that the town needs more policing. The Cabinet Member said that she could provide an estimate.

In response to a Member's questions relating to S106 monies, the Director of Finance and Assets said that:

- some S106 funding was time-bound – she could provide details if required – but a review in 2023-24 suggested that the risk of repayment was low;
- she could also provide details on specific S106 money that has been on the balance sheet for some time, and confirmed that a public art project was about to be initiated

There was no debate on this item.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the financial outturn performance position for the General Fund is received, and it is noted that in delivering services in 2023/24, after the application of carry forward requests and following the use earmarked reserves, there was an underspend of £318 against the 2023/24 revised budget approved by Council on 23 February 2024.**
- 2. £508,081 of carry forward approved by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers at Appendix 5 is noted;**
- 3. the annual treasury management report at Appendix 7 and the actual 2023/24 prudential and treasury indicators are noted;**
- 4. the capital programme outturn position as detailed in Section 7 of this report and Appendix 8 are noted, and the carry forward of unspent budgets into 2024/25 and the inclusion of one new project in the 2024/25 capital programme with a total commitment of £170,000 are approved;**
- 5. the year-end position in respect of Section 106 agreements and partnership funding agreements at Appendix 9 is noted;**
- 6. the outturn position in respect of collection rates for council tax and non-domestic rates for 2023/24 in Appendix 10 is noted;**

- 7. the financial outturn performance position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2023/24 in Appendix 11 is received, and the carry forward of capital budgets from 2023/24 into 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 12 is approved.**

10 Productivity Plan 2024/25

The Leader introduced the her report, highlighting the points set out in the executive summary, and said that the productivity plan for 2024-25 was presented for approval, in line with the previous government's requirements. She said it is based on information already included in the council's Corporate Plan and published decisions.

In response to Members' questions, the Leader said that:

- regarding EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and whether, in view of the previous government's statements about councils wasting money on ineffective EDI schemes and practices, it would have been prudent to include reference to this in the report and plan, the council chose to ignore the statements, as this is something CBC takes seriously – it is embedded in everything we do and an important part of everyone's wellbeing. We will wait and see what the new government brings forward;
- the Monitoring Officer is CBC's lead officer for EDI, which indicates the importance of the issue for CBC.

In debate, Members thanked the Leader and officers for the report, and made the following points:

- the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ought to get its own house in order before requiring councils to produce productivity plans – new government legislation has put additional burdens on local authorities with only derisory amounts of funding to help. This requirements treats local authorities with disrespect; hopefully things will change with the new government;
- the government is asking local authorities to do something which it doesn't do itself due to lack of join-up between its departments;
- one-year settlements do not allow local authorities to plan for the future and evolve as they go; hopefully the new government will recognise this and make changes;
- the report highlights the breakdown between local and national government and the barriers to more effective working. The new government will be aware of this, but not necessarily do anything about it.

The Leader said the district councils network is a good lobby group, has met to consider how to address this issue, and will meet with the new government soon, with CBC present to promote Golden Valley. County councils are also hugely affected, and it will be interesting to see how the problem is addressed by the new government. Things are moving at a fast pace, and the Leader is making sure the voice of Cheltenham and wider region is heard.

RESOLVED (unanimously) THAT:

- the Productivity Plan 2024/25 is approved.

11 Appointment to the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee

The Chief Executive advised Members that nominations to this committee were not called for at the previous meeting as the joint strategic arrangements had to be formally ratified by the County Council. Now that this has been done, he invited nominations to be put forward.

The Leader nominated Councillor Ben Orme.

As there were no other nominations, no vote was required, and Councillor Orme was accepted as CBC's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee.

12 Notices of Motion

There were none.

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

There were no other items requiring a decision.

14 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

RESOLVED THAT: the following recommendation is approved:

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)

15 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 18 March were approved unanimously without comment or amendment, and signed as a true record.