

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 18 February 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.20 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Victoria Atherstone, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis and Izaak Tailford

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships) and Tracey Birkinshaw (Director of Community & Economic Development)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Dobie and Horwood.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were no petitions.

Six public questions had been received. The questions and written responses were taken as read.

1. Question from Mr David Redgewell to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

With Cheltenham being the gateway to South West England and the Cotswolds for the public transport network, and Royal Well bus and coach station important to the local economy for residents and tourists, what budget is in place for 2025-26 to repair and maintain the shelters and waiting facilities, and is this shared with Gloucestershire County Council Integrated Transport Department as part of the bus services improvement plan?

Cabinet Member Response

I thank Mr Redgewell for his question. As many in the town are aware, the ownership of the furniture, shelters and infrastructure around the Royal Well Bus Node has been quite piecemeal since the County Council took on responsibility for transport provision in our town. Our Council own the two shelters by the old taxi rank and the County Council own those along the Royal Well. There are funds available if responsive repairs are required to these shelters and we will continue to work closely with the County Council to ensure any work done is coordinated with the Integrated Transport Plan.

Supplementary Question

The answer seems quite complicated, with half the bus station owned by the borough and half owned by the county. This may well resolve itself in the future with the unitary authority, but in the meantime, if the borough wants to invest in Royal Well as a transport hub, in line with the county's priority, is there an investment stream in the budget being set tonight?

Cabinet Member response

The unusual situation in Royal Well will be best addressed by the unitary authority in the future, when interests will be more consolidated and streamlined conversations can be had as to how to resolve the issues in line with a new transport plan.

2. Question from Mr David Redgewell to Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

From 12 December 2024, National Express Coaches has relocated many of its services (to Birmingham, Bristol, Weston-Super-Mare, Taunton, Exeter, Plymouth and Penzance) to the Arle Court Transport Hub, leaving just the services to London, Bournemouth and Southampton, Ross-on-Wye and Hereford operating out of Royal Well. Local bus services to and from Arle Court are limited, not operating on Sundays or after 8pm, while National Express services operate 24/7 from the transport hub. Is Cheltenham Borough Council, as the licensing authority for taxis, planning to install a taxi rank at Arle Court? This would seem an urgent safety provision for passengers, particularly women and girls, arriving at the transport hub at night.

Cabinet Member response

I thank Mr Redgewell for his question. I fully understand the well-made and valid points and concerns raised by him in his question.

Whilst it is true that Cheltenham Borough Council is the local licensing authority for taxis, this council is not the highways authority. As such, Cheltenham Borough Council is not empowered to designate new taxi ranks on adopted highway or land not owned by this council. The statutory power to formally designate new taxi ranks resides with Gloucestershire County Council Highways.

The road network around the new Arle Court Transport Hub is adopted highway and the land on which the Arle Court Transport Hub is built is not owned by Cheltenham Borough Council.

It is only Gloucestershire County Council Highways that can designate a new taxi rank at, or in the vicinity of, the new Arle Court Transport Hub.

I will ask officers in this council's Licensing Department to make contact with you, Mr Redgewell, to assist you with engagement with the correct department within County Council Highways.

Supplementary Question

National Express services are due to move to Arle Court in April, so the lack of both bus services and a taxi rank is an urgent matter, critical to the safety of people getting on and off buses 24/7. If the county will agree on a site for a wheelchair-accessible taxi rank, how quickly can the borough council grant a taxi licence granted for the rank?

Cabinet Member response

Taxis should be available at the new Arle Court Transport Hub; the response states that statutory power lies with Gloucestershire Highways, but officers and the Cabinet Member will be more than happy to work with the county to move things along.

3. Question from Mr Steven Thomas to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

A report published in the Times, following a freedom of information request, shows that Cheltenham Borough Council is proportionally the third highest council in the UK by committing 75.1% of the total revenue it receives from council tax to staff pensions:

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/other/quarter-of-council-tax-raised-is-spent-on-unjustifiably-generous-staff-pensions/ar-AA1wzssj>

Please explain how you can justify this (especially given that you have just approved an increase in council tax in December); surely there would be more funds available for public services (which is what people believe they are paying council tax for) if

this was allocated to what it was meant to be used for, instead of funding staff pensions?

Cabinet Member Response

The Times article correctly included the figure of £7,906,000 for the council's employer contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme in 2023/24. However, this is broken down into primary and secondary contributions. The total primary contributions made by Cheltenham Borough Council in 2023/24 was £1.648m. In addition to this the council then made a lump sum payment of £6.258m in April 2023 which covered the annual secondary contribution calculated by our actuary for the three years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26. The breakdown of the pre payment is as follows:

2023/24	£2.365m
2024/25	£2.080m
2025/26	£1.813m

By paying upfront, this created a year-on-year base budget saving for our required secondary contributions. However, the key benefit of the lump sum payment is to reduce our overall pension liability. Implementing this strategy over the past six years now means that from 01 April 2026, our pension fund is more than fully funded and no further secondary contributions will be required. This will generate a budget saving of £1.813m in 2026/27 as well as reducing our primary contribution rate.

Pension liabilities have been an ongoing risk in the local government sector, with many local authorities historically being in a position where they may be unable to meet the future liabilities of employees' pension contributions. The strategies employed by this council mean we not only protect the future pension drawdowns of our hard-working staff but also now mean we can re-invest in core services.

4. Question from Ms Melanie Valentine to Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

What are you going to do to clean up Hesters Way? It constantly stinks of weed and there is fly-tipping everywhere, it's disgusting.

Cabinet Member Response

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that the Neighbourhood Team will investigate the issues concerning the management of household waste within and around the area, and we will work with colleagues in housing to ensure a proportionate and appropriate mitigation process is in place for all issues that have been reported.

I have asked officers to clarify any reports we have received for the area and there have been nine service requests concerning fly tipping in the last four months; these have been investigated by the Neighbourhood Team and then booked in for removal via UBICO.

25/00121/FLYTPP - 13.01.2025 - ES/14662
25/00069/FLYTPP - 07.01.2025 - ES/14594
25/00039/FLYTPP - 06.01.2025 - ES/14571
24/05985/FLYTPP - 10.12.2024 - ES/14365
24/05861/FLYTPP - 03.12.2024 - ES/14296
24/05406/FLYTPP - 31.10.2024 - ES/14011
24/05289/FLYTPP - 28.10.2024 - ES/13958
24/05031/FLYTPP - 14.10.2024 - ES/13821
24/04814/FLYTPP - 01.10.2024 - ES/13710

There have been three service requests for the area concerning anti-social behaviour (ASB) and these are historic dating between 2011-2016.

The council works closely with the police and other agencies on such matters as the use and possession of drugs which is a criminal offence and should be reported to the police or Solace in the first instance as this is a medium/high level of ASB. The Neighbourhood Team will work with TMO and ASB officers within housing to support the efforts of partners in the mitigation, this includes investigation of the detrimental effect on the surrounding community that is causing alarm, harassment or distress.

The Neighbourhood Team, taking a partnership approach with the Police and Tenancy management officers will target the areas reported for these offences, this includes further patrols and presence in the location, relevant warnings and information on waste management, legislation concerning offences committed and enforcement where necessary and possible.

5. Question from Ms Melanie Valentine to Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

Are you going to put paths in the King George V Park to make it accessible to everyone, including wheelchairs, prams and buggies?

Cabinet Member Response

As a council we are determined to make our town and green spaces as accessible as we can. The long-term vision of the council and the local Friends of King George V Playing Field is to establish a circular path around the site, along with biodiversity and recreational enhancements. The costs of achieving this work is substantial, and consideration also needs to be given to on-going maintenance requirements to keep such facilities in a good and usable condition. There is currently no funding identified in council budgets for the installation of these paths, but it is hoped over coming years that external funding opportunities may lead to all, or some of it being constructed – and I will continue to work with officers to try to achieve this.

6. Question from Mr Robert Naylor to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

Several mature trees have been cut down on Leckhampton Hill, co-ordinated by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and FOLK in the name of providing amenity for adders. As CBC is the landowner, can you please confirm who gave permission for these trees to be destroyed and who paid for their destruction, at what cost?

Cabinet Member Response

The Council was approached by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust in 2023 to take part in its "Recovering Adders on the Cotswold Escarpment" Project funded from Natural England's Species Recovery Programme. Gloucestershire is one of the few remaining strongholds for adders with the species in decline or lost in neighbouring counties.

Since this time the council, along with Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK), have been assisting Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) to halt their decline and create a sustainable population of the species on the site. Initial work included creation of pathways for adder movement through dense vegetation. Following this GWT, in conjunction with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, surveyed the Hill to identify where adder populations exist and to identify what they considered to be an appropriate area to carry out the second strand to the project which led them to the site in question. Preferred methods of creating suitable habitat include tree felling to open up areas of dense canopy and provide suitable places for adders to bask, paired with coppicing and scrub control, and creating cover with brash and log piles to provide areas where adders can hide from disturbance and predators and create hibernation sites.

This is what has taken place to the area in question, since which time volunteers of the GWT and FOLK have returned to the site to complete the habitat creation by constructing the dead hedge and habitat piles. Officers of the council agreed to the trees being removed on the basis they were of low vitality and their loss was outweighed by the benefits of enhancing habitat for adders. A felling license was obtained from the Forestry Commission, with consent from Natural England. Other healthier trees were retained.

In terms of the cost, the GWT are the holders of the Natural England's Species Recovery programme budget which is in the order of £23,000 for the entire project. This element of the work cost around £6000.

I took a trip up the hill with our ranger to take a look for myself, and I do believe the work undertaken is justifiable and for a sound cause of nature recovery for a vulnerable species. But I am very aware that the work came as a surprise to many residents and there should have been greater engagement and proactive information sharing during the process, particularly as Leckhampton Hill is such a well-loved and visited site.

It is important that people are aware of the what, why and how of any big changes we make in our green spaces. Greater engagement would have also provided us

with a better understanding of the amenity value of the larch trees to hill users so that could have been taken into account.

I am aware that lots of information sharing has taken place since the project started in 2023, largely through FOLK who are the established public consultation body on the Hill, and that they have publicised the scheme in their quarterly newsletter and social media pages. But I think we could have done more as a council on this, and it is definitely something to improve upon going forward.

I have therefore asked that further work be done in the future, establishing a protocol for one-off projects such as this to ensure enough public information is given prior to works taking place, and plans adjusted where appropriate.

Our Green Space and Public Realm Manager has recently shared a more in-depth response to an open letter submitted regarding this topic, and I would be happy to share this if you have not seen it.

Finally, I do want to say how much we value the constructive relationship we have with FOLK and all the fantastic work they do (voluntarily) on behalf of the hill users. I cannot stress enough how vital Friends Of and volunteer groups are to our town and our beautiful green spaces.

Two Member Questions had been received.

1. Question from Councillor David Willingham to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

In Bracking, [2013] EWCA Civ 1345, case law considering the Equality Act 2010 s149 Public Sector Equality Duty, determined the following principles were applicable to decisions:

- i. The public authority decision maker must be aware of the duty to have "due regard" to the relevant matters;
- ii. The duty must be fulfilled before and at the time when a particular policy is being considered;
- iii. **The duty must be "exercised in substance, with rigour, and with an open mind". It is not a question of "ticking boxes"; while there is no duty to make express reference to the regard paid to the relevant duty, reference to it and to the relevant criteria reduces the scope for argument;**
- iv. The duty is non-delegable; and
- v. Is a continuing one.
- vi. It is good practice for a decision maker to keep records demonstrating consideration of the duty.

In the majority of reports that go to planning committees, the following boilerplate text is included in the report:

Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED)

As set out in the Equalities Act 2010, all public bodies, in discharging their functions must have “due regard” to this duty. There are three main aims:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;*
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people; and*
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where participation is disproportionately low.*

Whilst there is no absolute requirement to fully remove any disadvantage, the duty is to have “regard to” and remove OR minimise disadvantage and in considering the merits of this planning application the planning authority has taken into consideration the requirements of the PSED.

In the context of the above PSED duties, this proposal is considered to be acceptable.

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control please explain how the use of the same boilerplate text in every application demonstrates that any rigour has been applied to the consideration of the PSED within the planning process, and advise how the situation will be ameliorated?

Cabinet Member Response

Can I thank Cllr Willingham for his question. It is agreed that in some circumstances ‘boilerplate’ text will not be appropriate, such as where a specific equality issue has been identified by the case officer and a more detailed exploration of the issue in the committee report will be necessary. An example of this can be seen in the committee report relating to the redevelopment of North Place (ref. 24/00236/FUL); where the equalities impact of a loss of disabled parking was explored amongst other things. In cases where a specific equality issue has not been identified however, standard text reminding members of the committee of their obligations under the Equality Act is considered sufficient; it is not necessary, nor is it proportionate, to explore equality issues in any great depth where none have been identified.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for the response. Over many years as a councillor, I have seen the same copy and paste template on all applications, whatever equality issues are raised. If I provide more details of specific cases via email, can you look at this in more detail to ensure that the interests of people with disabilities were adequately considered at the time?

Cabinet Member response

It is the duty of the local authority to improve the service we offer to our residents, and if something can be changed to make the system work better, I would certainly consider it. Please let me have the further information for me to look at.

2 Question from Councillor David Willingham to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

In dealing with the Public Sector Equality Duty in planning matters, I am concerned that the needs of those with the protected characteristic of disability have not always been given consideration commensurate with the difficulties they face, with developers seeking to remove accessibility features to maximise profit. The assessment of such matters can be complex requiring an understanding of the different issues affecting those with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited, to neurodiverse difference, and impaired mobility, vision, or hearing; and addressing issues requires the will to push back against developers. Does the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control agree with me that more needs to be done to force developers to ensure accessibility, and could he please advise what additional work can be done within planning and via training of members of the planning committee to ensure the needs of, and impact on, those with protected characteristics is fully understood by the decision-makers and demonstrably considered during the planning process?

Cabinet Member Response

I would like to thank Cllr Willingham for his question. What the planning team can or cannot *force* developers to do is largely dependent on what is prescribed by planning policy. The role of Development Management officers (and the Planning Committee) is ultimately to apply and implement adopted planning policy. The Joint Core Strategy contains policies promoting inclusive design as does the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan, particularly in respect of inclusive public transport and inclusive pedestrian facilities; these policies are material to all planning decisions. Whether planning policies should go further in promoting and securing inclusive design is a matter that can be considered in the formulation of our next development plan (the 'Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan'). Councillor Willingham is encouraged to engage with our planning policy team on this issue.

Training about equalities and the Equality Act already forms part of the Planning Service's rolling training programme for members of the Planning Committee.

Supplementary Question

Thomas Jefferson said a measure of a society is how it treats its weakest members, and I have sat through planning committees at which public objectors identified issues where the Public Sector Equality Duty should have been engaged, yet this was not addressed by a single member of committee or officers present. If I provide the Cabinet Member with details, will he take a more detailed look? I believe we *can* force developers to be more considerate, not least by refusing applications that fail to make adequate provision – there is case law to back this up.

Cabinet Member response

Any information Councillor Willingham provides will be looked at, and we can work together to see what can be done to improve the service we offer.

5 Youth Voice: a process for hearing the voice of young people in Cheltenham

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities began by giving special thanks to all No Child Left Behind partners, the St Giles Trust, schools in Cheltenham, and young people, for their dedication and hard work to date in supporting the NCLB Year of Youth Action. She also thanked officers for their report which sets out clear recommendations based on the common themes identified by the 578 responses to the youth survey, in addition to the areas where we and our partners are already focussing, including engagement and inclusion, safety in the communities, recreation and opportunities, mental health and wellbeing, and digital safety and literacy.

She said the report confirmed that parents and extended family members are the most trusted sources of support for young people, but while every child deserves to feel safe and heard, it was sad to note that only 18% feel they are listened to, with many concerns around safety, both on line, in their communities, and in the town centre.

As part of the Year of Youth Action, the views of young people will help us understand what needs to be done to support the lives and outcomes of next generation. A lot of youth-led initiatives are already being worked on by the council and its partners, including support for a youth-led change maker initiative; police drops-ins aimed at supporting young people; together with NCLB partners and GCC, raising awareness of online safety for parents via local schools; safe haven pilots in race weeks; making sure young voices are heard to inform the narrative of future iterations of the council's culture and sports strategy; working with partners and businesses to develop a Cheltenham Youth Pass; establishing an NCLB Youth Voice sub-group to explore funding initiatives to help young people improve safety and recreation in their local parks; and working together to better understand children's mental health challenges.

The report is insightful, detailing all work carried out to date over past few years. A final report will be brought back to Cabinet in December, and in the meantime, Members' views were welcome.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said young people have a right to feel safe in the town and know that help is available if they need it; it is the sadness of the report that so many do not feel that this is the case, yet a great thing

that this has been recognised and that as a local authority, we are listening, looking, learning and taking action. She said officers have done an excellent job, working with partners across the town – including schools, the police, the Chamber of Commerce, BID and other local organisations. In March, she will present this work at the Congress of Europe, which is made up of amazing organisations encompassing the whole of Europe, and she is confident that the work being done at CBC will be a pilot study for all those organisations.

She thanked the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Tracey Birkinshaw, Kelly Patterson, and everyone involved from the university to BID, whose work will make a huge difference to the future of young people and the future of the town.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm thanked the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities and officers, and welcomed the project which originated from a motion he put forward with former Councillor Chidley. The report highlights ways to support young people, engage with them, and look for long-term solutions. He is particularly glad to be involved in helping to make the town's parks and gardens safer after dark, and said that the whole project is really positive, demonstrating that the council cares for everyone and does its best to listen to all its residents.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery agreed, welcoming NCLB's positive journey over the past decade. He said Members recognise its value, and while it is not unusual for young people to worry about the future, it is good that the council is listening to those worries and acting upon them. He thanked all those involved in this trail-blazing journey.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the update on progress made to date by No Child Left Behind - set out in Section 3 of the report - is noted;**
- 2. the outcome from recent engagement with young people (see Section 4 and Appendix 4 – “In their own words – youth survey report”) is noted;**
- 3. the work ahead to support the NCLB Year of Youth Action – see Section 5 of the report – is endorsed;**
- 4. the principles of the national Hear by Right are endorsed, and completion of a self-assessment is agreed (see Section 6).**

6 Local Validation Checklist

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control explained that the council has a statutory requirement to have a Local Validation Checklist, which is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it is up to date and compliant with our own local planning policy. The contents of our list are prescribed by national legislation, to

which our own local requirements can be added. This is a detailed document, containing a huge amount of information, and has gone to consultation not only with all our local partners but also with a number of CBC officers.

He said that if Members approve the draft document, he and the Head of Planning will approve the final document, including any minor amendments to formatting.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities thanked him for the very thorough document, which she said would be a great tool for developers, and streamline efficiency by enabling everyone to find the information they require more quickly.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the draft Local Validation List is approved (with its final published form/format/ appearance delegated to Head of Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control).**

7 Delivery of Vacant Units and Town Centre Land Use Efficiency Action Plan - update

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture and Wellbeing, the Leader presented his report. She said it is self-explanatory, and shows that a great deal of work goes on with landlords and vacant units, although it is clear that matters are not always within our control. That said, the council has had some successes, even if that is just making vacant units look more presentable.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery thanked the former cabinet member and now MP Max Wilkinson who started this work. He said it is frustrating when people make negative comments about the town going to rack and ruin when it is clear from the figures that it is doing relatively well, with a vacant unit rate at half the national average. He thanked officers for a great piece of work.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the report updating on progress against delivery of the vacant units action plan to date is noted.**

8 Volunteering Policy and Processes

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities was pleased to introduce another good and positive policy to support the work of the kind volunteers who give their time so freely across the town. She said there are over 260 registered individuals and over 30 groups, the majority of whom support the work of the greenspace team, but also help with events and other projects in the borough, with new opportunities arising since housing services were brought back in house, and with the activities of No Child Left Behind, including the Party in the Park on 06 August this year.

She said an up-to-date and robust policy is essential to support those volunteers, and the revised policy includes the adoption of a new partnership agreement for constituted groups operating on council land under their own insurance, setting out responsibilities and commitments on both sides. The updated volunteer handbook is a very useful tool for new and existing volunteers, and the council is also being asked to adopt the Gloucestershire Volunteering Collaborative definition of volunteering as set out in the report.

She thanked all of Cheltenham's volunteers for their outstanding commitment, and CBC officers who support them in their roles, adding that anyone interested in learning a new skill, sharing an existing one, or meeting new friends can find more information on how to do this by searching 'volunteering' on the CBC website.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm welcomed the report, saying anything that makes volunteering easier and safer for volunteers and officers is a good thing. He thanked the many volunteers who support the town's parks and greenspaces as have helped the brilliant greenspace team in achieving seven green flags and a 97% public satisfaction rate.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control thanked the Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety, saying that in his ward, a brilliant group of volunteers look after Benhall open space. They work with the rangers, some weekly and some occasionally, and have formed a real community in the area. He said the residents of Benhall are very pleased and grateful for all they do.

The Leader said that one of the strengths of the administration and the council's philosophy is that it cannot do it all alone, and has consequently built up a strong volunteering ethos and great partnership relationships with volunteers across the town. Like many other councillors, she volunteers in her own ward, and knows through first-hand experience the vital role that volunteers play in our communities.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the following policies and processes are adopted:**
 - **The Gloucestershire Volunteering Collaborative definition of volunteering (see Section 3.1)**
 - **Cheltenham Borough Council's updated Volunteer Policy (Appendix 3)**
 - **Template partnership agreement with constituted groups (Appendix 4)**
 - **Cheltenham Borough Council's updated Volunteer Handbook (Appendix 5).**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities and the Council's Leadership team to keep the policy and supporting documentation under review and to make changes as necessary to reflect best practice and legal and operational requirements.**

9 Dedication Agreement at Pittville Park - A435 Cheltenham to Bishops Cleeve Cycleway

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reported that, as part of the Cheltenham to Bishops Cleeve cycleway, the county council wants to use a narrow strip of land on the edge of Pittville Park, along Evesham Road. The council is happy to support this initiative that encourages people to ride bikes, and two consultation exercises have resulted in no representations from the public. The council will still own the land, but the county will have permission to use it for the cycle path and also pay for its maintenance.

There was no debate on this item.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the council should enter into the Deed of Dedication which contributes to the fundamental priorities of the Corporate Plan and Net Zero ambitions.**

10 Corporate Risk Register - update

The Leader introduced the report, saying how important it is to keep the risk register up to date, to recognise and address any potential pitfalls, and to calculate the outcomes if these are not acknowledged. She said effective management of risk is part of the council's culture and has always been a critical part of achieving our priorities and objectives. Following a review of the council's risk management policy last October, the register is looked at by the leadership team every month.

She said the report is self-explanatory, with eight new risks added since last time, four of which are highlighted in the report, and a full list included at Appendix 1. She added that it would be remiss not to note that if the risks associated with local government reorganisation are not managed effectively, it could cause potential disruption to certain services, and said the council must be mindful of this as it moves forward.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the Corporate Risk Register is noted.**

11 Business Rate Reliefs

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced her report, saying that retail, hospitality and leisure are very important to the Cheltenham economy, adding vibrancy and providing jobs, and the council must do all it can to support those industries across the town, including through discretionary business rates relief. She said there are no significant updates to the scheme this year; a few categories are being merged, and although this means sacrificing £50k of income, this is felt to be a worthwhile sacrifice.

The Leader said these are challenging times for business, and it is good to offer support which could mean the difference between some businesses existing or not. It is another example of the council doing things it is not required to do to support its residents and ensure a diverse range of businesses across the borough.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. Discretionary Rate Relief Policy set out in Appendix 3 is approved;**
- 2. the Head of Revenues and Benefits is authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, to implement any changes to the temporary relief schemes detailed in Appendix 3, as required by Government, or to ensure the successful operation of the schemes;**
- 3. decisions relating to the award of Discretionary Rate Relief in section 2, Hardship Relief in section 3 and Partly Occupied Relief in Section 4 of the policy in Appendix 3 are delegated as follows:**
 - Awards of up to £20,000 to be determined by the Head of Revenues and Benefits with reconsiderations being determined by the Deputy Chief Executive**
 - Awards between £20,000 and £100,000 to be determined by the Deputy Chief Executive with reconsiderations being determined by the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets**
- 4. due to the volume of cases, decisions in respect the award of temporary reliefs detailed in Appendix 3 are delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits and officers in the Business Rates team. In the case of a dispute, reconsideration will be made by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer;**
- 5. the Monitoring Officer is authorised to make the necessary changes to the Council's Constitution.**

12 Housing Revenue Account Revised Forecast 2024-25 and Budget 2025-26

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets gave a brief introduction to her report, which she said would be discussed in more detail at the meeting of Full Council on Friday. She said this is an exciting report – the first HRA budget since housing services were brought back in house – and it is good to be working with the former ALMO on ways to invest in Cheltenham's future and save costs. She asked Members to note the significant investment in homes, in particular the securing of additional council homes which are desperately needed throughout the country. The budget also includes investment in fire safety measures and decarbonisation to ensure warmer, cheaper homes, and is part of an ambitious strategy to come.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for an excellent report, commenting on how good it

is to have housing services back in CBC. She welcomed the plans to build more homes, providing more Cheltenham residents with decent, warm and comfortable places to live, and was especially pleased that many of the new homes will be built in her ward of Swindon Village. Looking at the homelessness figures, she noted that Cheltenham figures are lower than elsewhere in the county, and was grateful for the excellent work the council does to provide a safe space and a home for people to look forward to.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery agreed, saying that he is always amazed at the mind-boggling amount of money and what the council does with it. He was pleased that the council is still investing and doing everything it can for residents during the housing crisis, but saddened by the homelessness figures, commenting that during Covid, accommodation was found for homeless people but they are now back on the streets.

RESOLVED THAT: Cabinet recommends that Council:

- 1. Approves the final HRA budget proposals for 2025/26 shown at Appendix 2;**
- 2. Approves a rent increase of 2.7% for social rent homes, affordable homes and shared ownership homes and changes to other rents and charges as detailed within this report;**
- 3. Approves the HRA capital programme as shown at Appendix 3 and the detailed capital programme in Appendix 4;**
- 4. Notes the revised HRA forecast for 2024/25 and impact on the HRA balance.**

13 Final General Revenue & Capital Budget Proposals 2025-26 and Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report October-December 2024

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said there would be further discussion of the budget proposals at Council on Friday, but the main issue to note today is that the news from central government about local government reorganisation was received before Christmas, when officers were half-way through setting a long-term budget – so there are some significant changes to the budget which was out for consultation over the festive period, to ensure the council still has money in reserve and that essential services have the support they need for several years to come.

She said it is a budget for a time of uncertainty but not paralysed by that – it would not feel right, as Cabinet Member with responsibility to safeguard council tax payers' money, to sit on her hands and just hope the right decisions for the people of Cheltenham will be made in the future. When Cheltenham is part of a far larger geographical area, it will be harder to understand the street level detail of what the town needs, so it is important in the very narrow window between now and the abolition of Cheltenham Borough Council to make the right decisions and set the cards right for whatever comes next. This budget does so.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for the budget and for raising these concerns, saying the last thing anyone wants is for Cheltenham people to find they don't have a voice. CBC has always managed its finances well, from building and refurbishing of homes to well-run and maintained parks. She looked forward to further discussion at Full Council.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm noted that one welcome change to the draft budget is the additional £90k allocated towards streets and ground work, allowing more staff for cleaning streets - it is good to show that we are listening to residents' concerns and doing something about them.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets. He said that balancing the books has always been tricky and even though we are facing an abyss in future years, we still have to provide services and look after our residents. This budget does that, supporting people and investing in our beautiful town through sound financial management and without cutting services. This is to be celebrated.

The Leader said we are continuing to deliver in line with our corporate plan, and have done everything possible to ensure that residents realise we will continue to deliver services and that they will still have a voice in the future. To do this, we need to set realistic budgets, including putting some money in reserve to ensure that we leave the council's finances in the best possible state. She said an immense amount of work goes into the report and final budget, and thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and the officers who produced the reports.

RESOLVED THAT: Cabinet recommends that Council:

- 1. Approves the revised budget for 2024/25 which is reported as part of the budget monitoring process for 31 December 2024 in Section 6 and Appendix 17.**
- 2. Considers the budget assessment by the Section 151 Officer at Appendix 2 in agreeing the following recommendations.**
- 3. Approves the final budget proposals including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Cheltenham Borough Council of £244.79 for the year 2025/26 based on a Band D property (an increase of 2.99%), as detailed in paragraphs 9.1 to 9.6.**
- 4. Approves the savings / additional income totalling £1,130,000 and the budget strategy at Appendix 4.**
- 5. Approves the revenue growth items totalling £392,647 at Appendix 5.**

6. Approves the capital programme at Appendix 6.
 7. Approves the use of reserves and general balances and note the projected level of reserves, as detailed at Appendix 7.
 8. Approves the programmed maintenance programme at Appendix 8.
 9. Approves the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) detailed in Appendix 9.
 10. Approves the flexible use of capital receipts strategy as detailed in Appendix 10.
 11. Notes the Council position in relation to the Gloucestershire business rates pool for 2025/26.
 12. Approves the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26, including the continued payment of a living wage supplement at Appendix 11.
 13. Notes the responses to the questions raised during the budget consultation in Appendix 12.
 14. Approves the proposed fees and charges schedule for 2025/26 at Appendix 13, subject to appropriate consultation where required.
 15. Approves the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy 2025/26 at Appendix 14;
 16. Approves a level of supplementary estimate of £100,000 for 2025/26 as outlined in Section 18.
1. Based on the information included in Section 15 of this report:
 17. Approves the delivery of the Mobility Hub as a single-phase construction and increase the Councils commitment under the Development Funding Agreement to facilitate this change.
 18. Notes that a single-phase delivery is forecast to generate a further £4.8m in land receipts to the Council.
 19. Notes that despite an increased funding commitment under the Development Funding Agreement, this is more than offset by the provision of £20m in Levelling Up Funding; overall borrowing is circa £10.6m lower than previously approved.
 20. Delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery to finalise the terms of a Deed of Variation to the Development Funding Agreement.

14 Local Development Scheme

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said this document outlines the timetable for preparing the statutory development plan, which needs to be updated following the change in government and its recent announcements under Planned for Change, including updates to the National Planning Policy Framework and others, all referenced in the report. By law, the council needs to have an LDS as part of its Local Plan, in addition to a strategic local plan with its partners. As set out on Page 226 of the report, the LDS complies with the council's five corporate priorities.

The Leader commented that this is an important document which can easily be overlooked, and its links with our corporate priorities are reflected in the paper.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the updated Local Development Scheme for Cheltenham Borough, attached to the report at Appendix 3, is adopted with immediate effect;**
- 2. authority is delegated to the Director of Community and Economic Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, to prepare the Local Development Scheme for publication, correcting any minor errors of spelling, grammar, and typographical and formatting changes that do not affect the substantive content of the Local Development Scheme.**

15 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to update colleagues on work and news in their portfolios over the last month.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said she was looking to make every CBH tenant aware of how they can be involved in the council's decision-making process, with a readable and accessible leaflet being delivered to every household.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm had four items to share:

- he had undertaken to be open and transparent with the public about the situation with the Household Recycling Centre, and confirmed that the county council has declined CBC's request to take on the Swindon Road facility. He is working on a survey with Cheltenham's MP, and hopes the county will change its mind, though welcomed its opening Wingmoor Farm for an extra day – this is a well-run and efficient site, which takes a much wider range of items than Swindon Road, and CBC will work with the county going forward to see how this arrangement is working. He added that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the matter next week, including the impact of the HRC closure on fly-tipping and bring banks, and he thanked residents for their continued commitment to recycling;

- CBC has recently launched the Litter Lotto app to incentivise people to engage with keeping the town clean with litter-picking and prizes, and assist at home, with information about recycling and bin day reminders. He added that he hoped to launch tetra pack and soft plastics recycling later in the year;
- he recently visited Leckhampton Hill for an informative look at the work being done there, including a project with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) and Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) to create an area for adder preservation. Work is only undertaken for a sound cause – such as nature recovery or protection –but he understood that residents were not necessarily aware of this and said wider engagement would be undertaken in future to explain what, why and how changes to the green space were being made. He said that work cannot focus solely on keeping an area exactly the same for ever but aims at regeneration, restoration and recovery, preserving wildlife and ensuring safe enjoyment of this much-loved greenspace for everyone. He said the FOLK volunteers do brilliant work, and he looked forward to finding ways to improve collaboration and engagement going forward with them and the wider public;
- he welcomed the biodiversity and nature conservation work being done by volunteers and the greenspace team, such as the herd of cows which grazes on the hill, kept to certain areas with digital fencing, and the preservation of a wide range of flora and fauna. He was pleased with the important outreach work with Leckhampton High School, encouraging young people to engage with nature and the various projects and work underway.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities said it had been a very busy six weeks, full of inspirational events, most notably the first No Child Left Behind showcase event. This included performances from young people, testimony from young women about what it is like growing up in Cheltenham, exhibitions by partners, support agencies and youth agencies sharing information about what they are doing in the town, and an activity led by the Cheltenham Education Partnership, involving 11 schools presenting on topics aligned to the outcomes of the report *In Our Own Words*. The presentations were incredibly insightful and informative.

In addition, she has also had the pleasure of being invited to visit the Aspire Foundation charity, and The Rock on Tewkesbury Road.

The Leader also reported on busy times and many meetings, mostly concerned with the local government reform announced in December. She had still found time to continue volunteering in her community, and was delighted to have been invited to the official opening of Men in Sheds in Cheltenham. She was very glad that the council has been able to support this excellent organisation, which provides a supportive social space for men from all walks of life, sends restored tools and goods it cannot use to overseas, and produces excellent planters.

16 Cabinet Member decisions since the last meeting

Members reported on decisions they had taken since the last meeting of Cabinet:

1. 17 December 2024: Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Alisha Lewis

[To approve exceptions to the council tax premiums on empty homes and second homes from April 2025](#)

The Cabinet Member said minor alterations, in line with central government and backed at a national level, would help raise money to deliver front-line services, from long-term empty and second homes.

2. 20 December 2024: Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery, Councillor Peter Jeffries

[To enter into a contract with Plexal for project delivery](#)

The Cabinet Member confirmed that Plexal are specialists in the area of community engagement, and will also use their expertise on a three-stage approach to enhance skills in Gloucestershire.

3. 20 December 2024: Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

[Environmental Services – Litter/Recycling Bins](#)

The Cabinet Member welcomed this decision to install new bins and replace others for safety reasons, all in the best locations, to encourage recycling and considerate waste disposal.

4. 03 January 2025: Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

[To approve the proposed taxi fare increases](#)

5. 28 January 2025: Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

[To award the contract to BT Surveillance for works to upgrade the public realm CCTV network](#)

6. 06 February 2025: Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

[To approve the revised Sexual Entertainment Licensing Policy and Equality Impact Assessment for public consultation](#)

7. 11 February 2025: Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

[To enter into two contracts to continue delivery of Growth Hub business support](#)

The Leader said this decision continued the long-supported decision to offer support and knowledge on how to build business.