

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

Minutes

Meeting date: 16 December 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.25 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Izaac Tailford and Richard Pineger

Also in attendance:

Tracey Birkinshaw (Director of Planning and Building Control), Paul Minnis (Director of Major Development and Regeneration) and Matt Ward (Head of Housing Services)

1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were no Member questions or petitions. Two public questions had been received, the responses to which were taken as read. One questioner was present to ask a supplementary question.

1. Question from Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

Cobham Road Flats Parking

At the Cobham Road flats, residents face ongoing parking stress due to a lack of dedicated spaces, leading to informal verge parking and damage to footpaths and grassed areas.

Would the Cabinet consider commissioning a **small-scale feasibility study** to explore creating additional residents' parking bays — for example by re-purposing a limited section of unused green space — as part of a broader estate-improvement approach?

If the Cabinet agrees this should be pursued, would it also consider appointing a **named senior officer** to lead the design and consultation process with residents, so the scheme can be progressed without adding excessive workload to existing operational teams?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the question.

Council Officers are undertaking a high-level review of properties that have been identified as having redevelopment potential and this is one of the sites on the list. They are just at the start of the process, and any development would likely be some time into the future. The block is already on the neighbourhood works list for next year to lay a concrete pad for bins and is also due for fencing renewal along the right-hand side of the block which will improve the general amenity of the area. However, any additional parking configuration would be best left until the high-level analysis is completed early in the New Year. A further update can be provided at this time.

No supplementary question

2. Question from Emma Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

The Government has just announced that the elections scheduled for May 2026, for four regional mayors in England, have been postponed to 2028. Can the Cabinet please advise whether the Cheltenham Borough Council Elections for 20 of the 40 current Councillors, due to take place in May 2026, will definitely be going ahead? Please also provide details of circumstances that might impact and influence their decision, given the cost of running the Election, the amount of work already underway on the whole LGR model etc. and the fact that elected Councillors will have a very short term prior to the Unitary Elections in 2027.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the question. It is the government's decision as to whether elections in 2026 will go ahead. CBC is working on the assumption that elections will take place as scheduled.

As you know, Cheltenham Council is in an unusual position in that we held all-out elections following a boundary review in 2024 with those members topping the poll serving for four years. Therefore, members retain a strong electoral mandate until 2028, which on the current timescales will coincide with the vesting day of the new unitary authority.

We are currently engaging with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to remind them of our boundary review and our all-out elections in 2024 and to ask for clarity on whether they wish for us to proceed with elections in 2026 which may not represent a good use of taxpayer money when we face the prospect of further elections in 2027 to the new shadow authority.

As you were a member of the previous Conservative Group in opposition on the council, I am sure you will recall that a budget amendment was proposed every year by your group to move to four-yearly elections. I assume on this basis that if MHCLG decided to postpone elections for Cheltenham in 2026, this would be something that would be entirely supported by the Cheltenham Conservatives.

Supplementary question

Thank you for your response and for recognising the constant call from Cheltenham Conservatives to move to four-yearly elections to save Cheltenham residents thousands of pounds.

What is the council's preferred outcome from engagement with MHCLG? The first paragraph says you are assuming elections will take place as scheduled. In third paragraph states you are asking MHCLG if it wishes CBC to proceed with 2026 elections, given the all-out elections last year and more elections in 2027. This implies you would rather not spend taxpayers' money for one year in office, and the second paragraph reinforces this underlying preference, justifying that those elections in 2024 continue for a further two years.

When did you last hear from MHCLG, when are you expecting to hear their decision, and what do you make of MHCLG Secretary Steve Reed's response today in the House of Commons on this subject?

Cabinet Member response

I cannot comment on Steve Reed's response as I haven't yet heard it.

This question has arisen because after the boundary review and all-out election in 2024, it was CBC's intention to go back to two-yearly elections, as has been the custom and practice for many years. At that point, we didn't know the Local Government Reorganisation was coming forward. If elections to shadow authorities

will be required in 2027, a lot of councils are now wondering if there is any point in having local elections in 2026, not least from a financial perspective, as the whole LGR process is costing a huge amount of money with no additional government funding to pay for it. We are waiting for government clarification as to whether or not the May 2026 elections should go ahead – the decision has to be made by the second week in February – but in the meantime, we will continue on the assumption that next May's local elections will take place.

5 Publication of the Infrastructure Funding Statement and CIL Rate Summary Statement

Note:

The following correction was made after the publication of the agenda:

- Appendix 4 IFS Part 3 Infrastructure List – Part-Funded Projects
The cost of the next business case stage is £2,061,855.67 (not £2,061,855.67)

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control introduced the report, the statement and historic update of the IFS statement and CIL rate summary which we are required to publish. As such, it doesn't require debate or decision; Members are requested to agree to the recommendations as set out in the report. The detailed summary is in line with our Corporate Plan priorities, and Members will already be familiar with the regulatory requirements and figures. The contents are statutory, and with CIL contributions we also have to work with our SLP partners in collectively publishing this information.

He thanked the officers who worked hard in putting these reports together - Sam Layton, Sara Screen and Andrew Sherborne.

A Member commented that, given the massive pressure that local authorities are under, the importance of CIL funding cannot be understated, and said some exciting projects will be going forward with CIL funding, including works at the Prince of Wales Stadium and desilting the lakes in Pittville Park, as well as strategic projects. He said this demonstrates the importance of CIL monies to the council.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control agreed, adding that it is important to celebrate these great schemes and projects, and make sure that our communities are aware that they can ask for this help with community projects in need of support.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the publication by 31 December 2025 of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2024/25, relating to the financial year ending 31 March 2025, and the submission of its CIL and S106 information to Government, is approved;**

- 2. the Annual CIL Rate Summary Statement December 2025 is approved and its publication on the Council's website by 31 December 2025 is approved.**

6 Revocation of a number of Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said this report is the result of a huge amount of work by the planning policy team to revoke out-of-date and superseded planning guidance notes, statements and documents. He said the launch of a new CBC website has provided to opportunity to ensure that everything is current and valid. The report lists all the documents being revoked, and those being retained will be publicly available on the new website

He thanked officers John Spurling and Daniel O'Neill for their hard work.

Members welcomed and supported the opportunity to tidy up and streamline planning guidance and documents, as planning is essential to the shaping of the town. They also made the following points:

- it is a constant bugbear that many on-line documents are not up to date or withdrawn when so longer needed – not just at CBC but also true of central government websites. This is a great initiative, particularly important as we enter an age of Gen AI, where people use that to ask questions rather than looking at the actual documents;
- SPGs and SPDs are really helpful in the planning process, and it is interesting to see what is being revoked, including the fire station and police station. Could these not automatically drop off the system once the particular scheme or building is complete?
- CBC is proactive in producing guidance notes, particularly the Climate Change SPD, which make a big difference. The planning team should be congratulated for being ahead of the game with this.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control thanked Members for the positive comments. He didn't know if guidance and documents are removed once a scheme is complete, and wondered if this is something that can be looked at across the council. He said he is a great advocate of benchmarking, and senior officers always use best practice from similar authorities to build on; this is why CBC is so successful in some of its initiatives.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the list of SPGs, SPDs and the Urban Design Concept Statements informal guidance notes set out in Table 1 at paragraph 3.5 of this report are formally revoked and withdrawn from publication**

7 Policy Updates: Rent Setting, Voids, Recharge, Repairs

In introducing this item, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said the reports are updates of earlier work, have been to Cabinet Housing Committee, and have incorporated tenants' comments and suggestions. All present the position statement as of now, with the exception of the Voids Policy. She invited the Head of Housing Services to provide a verbal update, and he summarised the situation as follows:

- the voids procedure used to be internal, but is now public for complete transparency;
- CBC inherited the challenge of a substantive build-up of empty properties, always a moving feast but where 30-40 voids a month are to be expected, the number is currently three times that at 120, with 179 termination tenancies at the end of November;
- this is being dealt with by splitting voids into major (kitchens, bathrooms, plastering, heating systems) and minor, which still often require a lot of work. Following procurement challenges in the past, the team now has three contractors in place to deal with major voids, so that the in-house team can focus on turning round minor voids. Of these, one is working particularly well, and of the 77 major voids at the end of November, 65 are with contractors and due back by the end of January – although more major voids are added and passed on to contractors each week;
- we had 179 additional properties this year, 28 of which were transfers of existing council tenants to another council property, thus creating another void. Numbers are always changing, but things are going well, particularly with one contractor which has freed up additional resource so been able to reduce the number of major voids we've got with them;
- this creates a slight challenge with lettings as we can only let so many properties each month – they need to be advertised on Homeseecker, followed by shortlisting, viewings, verification and frauds checks. It is a complicated process, in addition to the challenge of approximately 70 new builds in Regency Village, 30 of which are available to be let, so we are currently looking at resource in the letting area, to avoid the situation where we have a lot of voids back but it is taking too long to secure tenants.

He concluded that he is confident that numbers will come down early next year, but that a huge amount of work is needed to deal with the backlog.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said she and officers work closely to get the best results – decent homes for tenants, ensuring they have a voice, tackling voids, reorganising how work is done, and making sure contractors are up to do the job. She thanked officers for all they do.

Members welcomed the update and were pleased to note that the voids situation is improving and new properties are coming through to relieve housing pressures. They made the following observations:

- with a high turnover of one-bedroomed flats in St Mark's, could anything be done to encourage people to stay in the area when they move on from this type of accommodation?

- the clearly-written tenant versions of all the policies are excellent, helping people to clearly see their responsibilities;
- Cheltenham has one of the highest levels of social housing in Gloucestershire, and although CBH did a good job, bringing housing back in house is one of best decisions the council has ever made, providing the chance to look at whole thing - refresh, rewrite, and work with tenants;
- voids have been the biggest single issue, as empty properties bring no rent and become more dilapidated while housing lists grow, so prioritising voids and finding trustworthy contractors is challenging but vital, and the team is wished every success.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Housing Services said there was an average of 24 terminations a month, with some tenants moving on to non-council properties and others needing larger council homes. Reasons for terminations are tracked, and generally seem to be down to nothing more than the cycle of life. Voids are adjusted every week, and working closely with Housing Options means that an emergency case or homeless family can be prioritised if needed.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said that not all councils are in a position to offer accommodation to homeless people, but that tenants are at the heart of everything we do. In addition, listening to tenants is helping, and if they tell us that work is not being done properly by contractors, this can be addressed, all helping with the vital work of getting properties back into use rather than sitting empty.

She wished everyone in the housing services team a very happy Christmas.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Rent Setting Policy (Appendix 2) is approved;**
- 2. the Recharge Policy (Appendix 5) is approved;**
- 3. the Empty Homes (Voids) Policy (Appendix 8) is approved;**
- 4. the Repairs and Maintenance for Tenanted Properties Policy (Appendix 11) is approved.**

8 Half-yearly Treasury Management Report

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets introduced the report, which was discussed at Full Council on Monday, saying it was a regulatory requirement to report and review the first six months of the financial year. He confirmed that general fund borrowing costs and investment returns are on target as forecast in the budget for 2025-26, a testament to the hard work of the team, and that CBC is insulated to some degree from volatility in relation to borrowings, having a decent amount on fixed rates, and that short-term borrowing is coming down.

A Member commented that it would be helpful to have a bit more explanation and narrative around the different descriptions of market volatility, to give context to people who are not experts in treasury management.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said it was difficult under the budgetary process to have a very descriptive narrative, but he could see that this would be useful and undertook to have a conversation with the team to provide more narrative and a more reader-friendly way of describing things.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the contents of the summary report of the treasury management activity during the first six months of 2025/26 are noted.**

9 Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report, July-September

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets apologised for the late report, which he said shows how the council's finances stand at the end of November, and give a clear picture of where it is on track and where it is starting to see some pressures. At this stage, we are forecasting overspend of £564k by the end of the financial year, largely due to lower-than-expected income in a few areas, but there are some positives as well. Overall, this means we need to keep close eye on spending over next few months; if the position doesn't improve, we will call on reserves to balance the budget which would take the general balances below the level we want to hold. He added that some savings agreed for this year are also proving hard to deliver, and are being actively reviewed.

He said there is volatility and uncertainty in areas of the national economy even after the recent government budget announcements, and equally the pending local government reorganisation is having negative effect on resources and capacity; there is no government funding for this, and the impact organisationally is unavoidable and unforeseen.

He ended by thanking the finance and leadership teams for their hard work throughout the year.

A Member thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets for the report. He said it is disappointing that there will be an overspend and the council will be using reserves by the end of the year, but the report is open, explains what is going on and, he suggested, reserves exist to be spent when things don't go the way the financial strategy intended. This is good jurisprudence, and CBC is in a strong position despite all that is going on.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets welcomed these comments and pointed out that this is a Quarter 2 overspend; he hoped not to be in the same position at the end of the year. A lot of work is going on in the background with the teams, making savings and adjustments as we move forward; he agreed that this is what reserves are there for but said there is not optimum level of reserves and he hoped that we don't have to use them. He concluded that budgets have been challenging over the last few years the council and finance team is doing all it can to keep everything on track.

The Leader added that it is important to remember that this is not the year-end report, and that it highlights the importance of budget monitoring reports to ensure a constant handle on CBC's finances at any moment in time.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the contents of the report, including the key projected variances to the general fund and Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets approved by Council on 21 February 2025, and the actions to ensure overspends are reduced as far as possible by the end of the financial year, are noted.**

10 Interim Budget Proposals for General Fund and HRA

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that under normal circumstances, the Cabinet would be discussing the interim budget proposals at this meeting, which would then go out for consultation. However, after being presented with single-year settlements for many years, making long-term financial planning difficult, the incoming government is giving us a multi-year settlement which although welcome comes with some uncertainty. The companies that provide modelling and up-to-date, relevant information about the budget suggest there could be a difference of £2m in our budget alone, so rather than consult on a set of figures that may prove unreliable, we have opted to wait until after the government announces its figures, then work through those before going out to consultation, to ensure the best position and the best financial information. This is unfortunate but unavoidable and will require an additional Cabinet meeting but it is the right thing to do, to maintain openness and transparency.

The Leader confirmed that the settlement was originally promised for 30 November, but has now been pushed back to 17 December. She agreed that deferring this item to an extraordinary meeting on 23 December is not ideal but the right thing to do, allowing a few days to work out the impact it will have on our budget implications.

11 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Leader invited Members to present their briefings.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency shared the following:

- he presented his first report, on carbon emissions, to Council on Monday; it was well received, and will be used to move forward and improve our approach to Net Zero by 2030, as pledged in 2019;
- November has been a month of progress on our climate plan, including:
 - hosting the inspiring schools climate conference in the council chamber;
 - awarding over £35k in Cheltenham Zero grants to local businesses driving low carbon innovation;
 - advances in flood resilience work with an updated response plan now in place and community flood wardens joining the network;

- housing retrofit projects are moving forward, with work on 87 properties completed under the social housing decarbonisation fund scheme and plans for low carbon heating well under way.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space briefed on three items:

- Cheltenham's 'friends' groups are massively important, engaging with communities, making a real difference and saving the council money; a new one recently held its first event at Newcourt Green in Charlton Park, and the new Roamers Group is also working well;
- he is meeting with bereavement services to consider direct cremations and green burials and how to work down some of the deficit we currently have on revenue to offer a new service;
- street cleaning is moving forward, with most roads cleared of leaves, many others to be done before the end of year, and the remainder in January and February. This requires a lot of coordination with the county, including signage, car removal and drainage works, so although the situation is not great in some areas, residents can be assured that the council is working on it.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said all had paid tribute the Deputy Chief Executive Paul Jones at Council on Monday, and a later agenda item approved the appointment of a new S151 officer, which the council is legally required to have. He thanked the Chief Executive, Leader and all the finance team for their work, and said that every meeting without Paul is difficult.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services shared several items:

- she enjoyed a visit to Riding for the Disabled in Cheltenham, to help distribute some of the nearly 900 selection boxes collected by Citizen of Honour David Bath for children in Cheltenham. She said that he and housing officers have done great job raising cash and providing the selection boxes, and thanked them and all officers for their help;
- work has started at Saracens and The Hub, with piling work finished today;
- she met two new staff members today, and is looking forward to working with them and others in the year ahead;
- she was in Malta last week, with the Local Government Association, and as always, it was a privilege to be able to share what CBC doing as a commercial council, bringing housing back in house to make it better and working with all Cheltenham communities to improve people's lives. She is looking forward to next year's formal meeting in June, which will take place at Father Christmas's official residence in the Arctic Circle;
- she has been visiting various locations Cheltenham, talking to tenants, seeing their flats and houses, including Barlow Road where new pipes are now being fitted. Tomorrow she will visit sheltered housing accommodation at Wallace House to meet residents;
- a number of policies are coming forward, including domestic abuse work, and preparation for the regulator;
- she has been designated the person responsible for housing complaints, so has attended a meeting in Leeds, and will meet the ombudsman on line on 19

January. This is good, and pertinent to providing the best possible homes for our residents.

For clarity, the Leader pointed out that visit to the Arctic Circle is part of the Cabinet Member's role in the Local Government Association, and will not be financed by CBC.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Realm had been busy as always and had several items to share:

- a positive meeting with County Councillor Joe Harris and the Civic Society, to share developing plans for the town centre public realm. The council is working hard to deliver long-term results, of which we can be proud;
- together with Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnership), a meeting with Smith's Rugby and the RFU to see what funding opportunities there are to help the club continue to grow; and with Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space, a meeting with Leckhampton Rovers for a regular check-in and discussion about areas of town where we can develop football and improve pitches;
- a meeting with Harriers Athletic Club and the BBC to reaffirm CBC's position on resurfacing the Prince of Wales stadium's athletics track to get it back to the standard required for 8-9 high-level events a year. This is a £600k project and cannot be delivered immediately due to financial pressures, but he hopes CIL regional funding might help, particularly as this is a regionally important site, not used exclusively by Cheltenham residents;
- a regular meeting with Cotswold Plus LVEP (local visitor economy partnership), which brings together councils in the county and beyond to collaborate on tourism and visitor economy matters and is always positive;
- a meeting with Tony from Lansdown Arts Studios, with a tour of the building and site to provide a better understanding of what the artists do there and the amazing art they create;
- with the Marketing Cheltenham team, a meeting with the English Symphony Orchestra, to offer the council's support in growing classical music in Cheltenham, including various residences at the Town Hall;
- together with the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Horwood, the opening of the ice rink. Thanks to the Marketing Cheltenham team for delivering this again, open every day until 04 January, and providing many different types of sessions for everyone and a great opportunity to come to town and have some fun.

Finally, he reminded everyone that there is lots going on in Cheltenham for residents and visitors between now and the new year, with pantomimes at the Everyman and the Playhouse, and also the Pittville Pump Room pop-up café, open from 22-31 December, with live music - a great place to go with the family.

The Cabinet Member for Major Developments and Housing Delivery was happy to report on the latest progress at 320 Swindon Road, where much-needed affordable housing is being built on a disused car park. She said recent work has focussed on foundations and drainage, and levelling the site out for expensive vehicles to start work in the new year. She said on-site work will break from 19 December, to avoid

any disturbance to local residents, but that drainage work on the adjacent Malvern Street will be complete by Christmas.

She added that she was delighted to hear officer comments earlier in the meeting about residents moving into the affordable homes at Regents Village, particularly wonderful at this time of year, and with the promise of many beautiful new homes being completed and ready for families to move into in 2026.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities had a number of items to share:

- huge thanks to officers and Gloucestershire Constabulary for the strong and effective partnership work on the Safer Streets summer campaign - their joint efforts have resulted in a 5% reduction of reported crime in identified town centre hotspots;
- thanks to all the young people she has been privileged to meet in the past month, together with Geraldine, a No Child Left Behind officer – at youth groups in Whaddon, Springbank, Hatherley and St Peter's. They have provided valuable insight as to what they want from the proposed new Cheltenham Youth Pass, including a more affordable and accessible choice of activities in the town centre, which will make sure we have the right conversations with activity and hospitality providers, and that hospitality in Cheltenham to get the best deals;
- there are also exciting developments coming forward in the new year, with a potential venue identified for a youth cafe – a safe, accessible town centre place that young people can call their own;
- she has an important meeting coming up with the accessibility forum, during which she will go on a night walk wearing simulation glasses to understand how difficult it can be to navigate the town centre with a visual impairment. This will help the council do its best to make sure the town is as accessible as possible;
- thanks to the licensing team for their great efforts in putting together this year's Purple Flag survey, with important feedback from residents and visitors about their experience of the town centre. Cheltenham has been awarded accreditation for ten consecutive years, but is only as good as the previous year, and needs feedback to ensure the town continues to be lively and safe. The survey ends on 09 January 2026;
- finally, she also wanted to congratulate community hero Dave Bath for his fantastic work providing selection boxes for children and young people, and to thank all partners, individuals and the council for their contributions, which have a huge impact across Cheltenham.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control had no exciting news to share, but thanked planning and building control officers, and also the comms team with whom he works closely, for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

The Leader said she was lucky to have attended the press night of the Playhouse pantomime, which she described as magnificent – professional, full of good humour, affordable, and involving many young people – and said her grandson particularly enjoyed it. Apart from this, she said much of her time is spent working through Local Government Reform and planning reforms.

All Cabinet Members thanked their officers, colleagues and partners for all their hard work and collaborative spirit, and wished them all a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

12 Cabinet Member decisions since last meeting

Members reported the following decisions taken since the last meeting:

1. [To award a contract to Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers \(GARAS\)](#)
Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
2. [Approval of the award of grant funding for the Cheltenham Playhouse Theatre](#)
Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford