

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 23 March 2026

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 3.45 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Dr David Willingham (Chair), Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Julia Chandler, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Sandra Holliday, Tabi Joy, Alisha Lewis, Dr Cathal Lynch, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities), Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive) and Adele Taylor (Interim S151 Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Barnes, Beale, Garcia Clamp, Healy, Jeffries, Oliver and Orme.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting of Council on 23 February were approved as a true record, and signed accordingly.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted two minor points in Appendix 11 Pay Policy Statements:

- the incorrect date on the front page (2025-26 instead of 2026-27);
- reference within the document to the S151 Officer also being the Deputy CEO.

She confirmed that the CEO will use delegated powers to make the necessary amendments.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor had circulated in advance a list of his engagements and events attended since the last meeting. Of the many, he highlighted one in particular – his visit with Councillor Pervaiz, Mayor of Tewkesbury, to morning prayers at Cheltenham Mosque, where they were both made very welcome. He said he has attended many events in places of worship across the whole spectrum of denominations during his year in office, and always been reminded that there is so much more that joins together people of all faiths and of none than divides them.

As this was the last meeting of Full Council before the May elections, he took the opportunity to thank all Members, particularly those who are planning to stand down and those who aren't re-elected, for their service and hard work over the last two years.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council shared the following:

- at its recent annual conference and after much consultation, the District Councils Network officially launched its change of name and brand to Local Councils Network, getting ahead of the game well before district councils no longer exist. It has an important role to play as local government reorganisation continues around the country;
- Members are reminded to respond to the Community Governance Review – and to encourage as many residents as possible to do so too;
- the government's consultation on LGR options for Gloucestershire closes on Thursday if Members wish to submit comments. She is responding on behalf of the council, and will share her response once it has been submitted;
- work on the Strategic and Local Plan continues to progress, with the partnership working well across the board, but faced with unrealistic housing numbers set by government, which will require a conversation with our MP and the government about how to tackle our housing need. Southwest Councils are collectively lobbying on this – they all want to build houses, but the number, quantity and location of these must be decided locally. The new government figures also mean that where CBC could previously demonstrate 4.5 years of its 5-year housing supply, it can now only demonstrate 2 years through no fault of its own;

- the loss of the airport sale is clearly disappointing, but the deal could not be completed. GCC and CBC are now working on alternative options. Members will be kept updated;
- we are sending a joint responses on the Spatial Development Strategy and Food Standards Agency consultation, conveying a strong message that our economy, funding and public sector services look south, and we anticipate becoming part of a combined strategic authority in due course, leaning towards Bristol and the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) rather than the Midlands. Cheltenham is very much part of the south west and we aim to communicate this to government;
- thanks to all Members who have served for the last two years, and commiserations to anyone who isn't re-elected.

6 To receive petitions

There were none.

7 Public Questions

Eight public questions had been received from four questioners, two of whom were present to ask supplementary questions. The original questions and written responses had been published and were taken as read.

1. Question from Elliot Craddock to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens, and Public Green Space, Councillor Paul Baker

What progress has been made in reopening the Swindon Road tip, since it was closed on January the 10th 2025, well over a year ago?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

As you rightly point out Cheltenham Borough Council closed the Household Recycling Centre (HRC) in January 2025 because to comply with the new licensing regime of the Environment Agency we would have had to spend around £1m on improvements. Given the significant constraints of Local Government financing following 14 years of cuts imposed by the previous Conservative government and now extended for the next 3 years by the Labour government, this money was simply unavailable.

Notwithstanding the above you will appreciate that the HRC function falls under the remit of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and not Cheltenham Borough Council. When the HRC was closed the then-conservative administration at GCC refused point blank to offer any support whatsoever to re-opening it, pointing out the 'nearby' facility they operate at Wingmoor Farm.

The good news, to a point, is that the new Liberal Democrat administration at GCC have been far more engaging with us about the future of the HRC. Numerous meetings and an exploratory site visit have been held, and we are now awaiting to hear back from them following their review of options at the Swindon Road depot.

Needless to say, whatever the outcome, the site still requires significant investment which will need to be funded by GCC but in our view there is no question that Cheltenham, as the largest urban centre in the county, must have its own HRC for the convenience of its residents and the expanding population.

In the meantime, Cheltenham Borough Council continues to expand the range of its kerbside recycling options which are soon to include tetra paks. In addition, the trial scheme for the collection of flexible plastic bags and packaging collection is ready to be rolled out across the town.

Supplementary question

From conversations with county councillors, it appears that CBC announced the closure of the Swindon Road HRA very abruptly and didn't reach out to the county council for help. Is there any evidence to suggest that it did?

Cabinet Member response

The current Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space was not in post at the time, but the Leader confirmed that following the Council debate, she undertook to communicate with Cllr Davies at the County Council and an email conversation took place before the HRA was closed.

2. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Before Christmas, Ed Davey wrote to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to complain that cancelling elections was against human rights. In January Rowena Hay confirmed the council was asking to postpone the local elections. Now that we know elections are going ahead anyway, who was wrong?

Cabinet Member response

The Government was wrong. It was their decision to postpone elections and also their decision to u-turn on that decision. Cheltenham Borough Council had all-out elections for the whole chamber in 2024. Our mandate is less than two years old and is a stronger mandate than almost all our district neighbours. While we maintain that holding elections is not the best use of taxpayers' money, and despite the mess the government has made of its decisions, we now look forward to holding elections in May.

Supplementary Question

The government offered the opportunity for elections to be cancelled; the council could have said no. Do you agree that the Liberal Democrat council is in lockstep with the government?

Leader response

No.

3. Question from Gill Hewlett to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

What are Canada Life's plans for the former Cavendish House site, when will they begin, how long do they anticipate taking to completion, and what measures have the council taken to accelerate the process ? - the area is becoming increasingly derelict and without significant, and effective council intervention I cannot see how this will not deteriorate further.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question Gill. Unfortunately, these questions are mostly a matter for Canada Life to answer. It is their building, and timelines on getting definitive plans for the future of the building are outside of the council's control.

However, we all know how important Cav House is to our town centre and local economy, particularly for the businesses in the immediate area on and around The Prom. So please rest assured we are doing all we can to encourage Canada Life to take action as swiftly as possible. You may have seen Cheltenham Borough Council has publicly called for Canada Life to progress its plans and to put forward positive plans for the building. As a company they promote their values of investing in and making a positive difference to communities, and this council will continue to hold them to account on this commitment and encourage Canada Life to deliver a successful future for this critical town centre site.

I am pleased to advise that Canada Life has recently engaged with the council in its role as local planning authority on pre application of a revised scheme. I cannot advise any further at this point but actively encourage Canada Life to bring forward a positive planning application for the site at the earliest opportunity.

No supplementary question

4. Question from Gill Hewlett to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

There are significant amounts of unwanted graffiti around the town, a notable example being the end of the lower high street, by the railway bridge and the Honeybourne Gate complex. Knowing the highly possible links of graffiti to gang culture, how much have the council allocated in the budget to clear up graffiti in the town, and what are the timescales for tackling it?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question, it is something that I, and my cabinet colleagues, feel strongly about. Following years of budget cuts from central government, local authorities across the country, including Cheltenham, are doing their best to fund the cost of removing increasing amounts of graffiti in our borough. We rely on support from the police to catch the perpetrators, but police resources are also stretched, and they have to prioritise their resources on more serious crimes.

The council is responsible for removing graffiti on public buildings. However, on non-public buildings, our policy states that offensive graffiti should be removed by the property owner within 14 days of receiving formal notice from the authority requesting its removal; failure to do so may result in a Community Protection Notice (CPN) being issued to the property or Premises/Business owner. Other non-offensive graffiti should be removed within 28 days.

The council's environmental services partner, Ubico, seeks to remove graffiti from public buildings within 10 days of receiving a request to do so. Generally, offensive graffiti is removed within one working day where possible.

In parts of Cheltenham town centre, there has also been a very successful pilot scheme with the Cheltenham BID, collaborating with the Council and the Police, for graffiti removal on business premises within the BID area. This has recently entered its second phase, though I note it does not cover the area of lower high street mentioned in your question.

Also, on the Honeybourne Line, we currently have an active project brief live for targeted public art works there – which could include covering up of graffiti. I look forward to updating you more as this progresses.

Annually the council spends around £1.7 million on street cleansing and it is within this budget that graffiti removal is funded, along with litter picking, litter bin emptying, fly tip removal, mechanical sweeping of pavements and roads, and jet washing pavements. The council does not currently separate out the cost of graffiti removal.

If you spot any graffiti in Cheltenham, please do report it to us so it can be logged and action can be requested from the responsible party.

No supplementary question

5. Question from Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Can you please update me on the position with regard to the possible sale of Gloucestershire Airport?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the question. Cheltenham Borough Council, alongside joint shareholder Gloucester City Council, have been unable to reach agreement with Horizon Aero Group (HAG). The councils are disappointed that we were unable to accept the terms put forward by HAG.

It is important that the shareholding councils will now maintain close contact with operators, tenants and stakeholders to explore alternative options.

As Leader, I understand that and appreciate that this will be a cause for concern for all those working at the airport and for business owners who operate from there.

I want to assure you that we are committed to engaging with all parties so that we can reach a positive outcome for the future of the airport.

Supplementary question

Can you indicate if the failure to sell the airport has implications for the council's financial position, particularly the capital programme, and give some idea of the cost of the abortive sale exercise so far?

Leader response

It has no impact at present for this budget, but if we are still in the same position next year, there could well be an impact.

Regarding the costs, this was not an abortive sale – the prospective buyer could not raise the funds due to the failure of one of their investors to come through; we gave them time to find a new investor but they were unable to do so within the timeframe, and rather than prolong the uncertainty, the deal was abandoned. Council will be kept updated on any progress.

6. Question from Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Can you please update me on the possible sale of the Municipal Offices?

Cabinet Member response

The council has entered into an exclusivity agreement for the sale of the Municipal Offices. The preferred bid proposes to re-develop the building into a hotel, spa and banqueting/conferencing destination.

The exclusivity agreement continues to progress and we will provide further updates when a more definitive timetable for the sale is known.

No supplementary question

7. Question from Rich Newman to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Why did no borough councillor call in to committee The Bell Inn's planning proposal? That could have saved it.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question, I assume that you are referring to planning application ref. 25/01196/FUL which was granted in October 2025. The approved scheme involves the conversion of the upper floors of the Bell Inn and part of the ground floor to three flats, with the remainder of the ground floor used for commercial purposes.

The application was determined under delegated powers; it was not called to the Planning Committee. Members themselves are best placed to set out why they did not call the application to committee. It is not appropriate for me to put words in members' mouths, but it is the case that planning applications may only be called to committee if there are legitimate material planning reasons for doing so and when it is in the public interest (this is set out in our adopted Scheme of Delegation); in this case it can only be assumed that members felt that no material planning reasons were present and that there was no necessity, in public interest terms, for the application to be debated and determined by the committee.

No supplementary question

8. Question from Rich Newman to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

How much of the council's budget goes towards paying pensions of previous employees?

Cabinet Member response

The Council is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme with the Gloucestershire Pension Fund that is administered by Gloucestershire County Council on behalf of member bodies.

The Fund collects employer and employee pension contributions in relation to active employees of relevant organisations and meets the cost of pension benefits due to current and former employees including those within Cheltenham Borough Council. The pension scheme is a defined benefit scheme and has to demonstrate it can be fully funded through triennial reviews, the latest of which was completed during 2025.

Following this actuarial review, the council has set a budget for the financial year 2026/27 to pay £2,319,870 for primary pension contributions and £290,000 for secondary contributions. These secondary contributions cover off the liabilities for

past service. In total, £2,609,870 of the council's 2026/27 budget is allocated to pension-related costs.

The contribution rate is equivalent to a 17.1% which is a significant reduction on the prior period due to the improved overall financial position of the pension fund mainly due to stronger future investment returns.

No supplementary question

8 Member Questions

Four Member questions had been received from four Members. The original questions and written responses had been published and were taken as read.

9. Question from Councillor Cathal Lynch to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

There is a strong local interest in the nature of the frontage at the 131 restaurant/bar on the Promenade. Given how long the current structures have been present, can we have some clarity on if and why there have been any delays in changes being made as previously directed by the council?

Member response:

Thank you for your question.

The marquee structures currently situated forward of 125-133 Promenade are unauthorised and do not have the benefit of planning permission. An Enforcement Notice requiring these unauthorised structures to be removed, was served on the property owner in January 2024. The legislation is such that when an appeal is lodged against an Enforcement Notice, the Enforcement Notice is suspended until such time that the appeal has been determined.

In this case, the property owner lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate shortly after receipt of the Enforcement Notice (February 2024); the Notice is therefore currently suspended, and this will remain the case until the Planning Inspectorate determine the appeal. The Planning Inspectorate has now been dealing with this appeal for over two years, and to-date has declined to provide a meaningful update.

Notwithstanding the live appeal, the property owner may remove the marquees at any time and replace them with the permanent structures which were granted planning permission in March 2025, but to-date has not done so. The council has no power to force the property owner to remove the marquees while the Enforcement Notice is suspended by the appeal proceedings.

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

Planning application forms contain the following declaration which must be accepted by the applicant or agent: "*I/We confirm that, to the best of my/our knowledge, any facts stated are true and accurate and any opinions given are the genuine opinions of the person(s) giving them.*" Could the cabinet member for planning please advise how many cases in the previous and current municipal year have misstatements been identified and reported by a) officers, b) councillors, and c) others, and how many applicants or agents have suffered any sanctions or consequences for making untrue or knowingly inaccurate statements on planning applications (including details if the matters are not *sub judice*)?

Member response:

Thank you for your question.

The planning department does not record this data in a numerical format and so the number/frequency of individual circumstances of inaccurate information within planning submissions cannot be reported.

The submission of inaccurate information is uncommon and when it does occur it is often because of a genuine error or misunderstanding. The correct and reasonable approach when receiving inaccurate information is to seek its withdrawal and/or correction and this is what our Planning Officers do. If the revised corrected information is material, re-consultation of neighbours etc. will usually follow. No further sanctions are necessary.

11. Question from Councillor David Willingham to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

The Cheltenham Borough Council Housing Voids Policy suggests the majority of properties are supplied unfurnished and without white goods such as a cooker, washing machine or fridge-freezer. Where a person or family being housed do not already have these items, the cost of new white goods is considerable, and options such as commercially renting them weekly or credit/borrowing are very expensive and depending on an individual's credit history may not even be available. Would the cabinet member for housing agree to explore how CBC Housing could assist tenants to acquire and pay for white goods as part of their agreement with CBC and help them avoid exorbitant weekly charges or debt interest and the financial risks those options can lead to?

Member response

Thank you for your question.

I'm pleased to be able to share that the Council already does a number of things to help our tenants who do not have white goods. For example, we have our Help2 scheme and we make referrals for grants to places such as the Barnwood Trust and the Household Support Fund alongside using the Turn2us grant tool which identifies further charities and grants that our tenants may be eligible for.

In addition, our Empty Homes Team are really skilled at finding out upon viewing/sign up what the tenant may be missing and referring tenants to our benefit and money advice team so that they can look to see what help we can provide.

Last year we also ran a Home Starter pack scheme which provided those who were homeless and moving into our properties for the first time with a new home starter kit. It included items such bedding, towels, cutlery, crockery and either a microwave, slow cooker, or air fryer. The scheme was so successful that we have set aside enough budget within the 26/27 financial year to run it again this year.

Please be assured that we do absolutely everything we can to support our tenants.

12. Question from Councillor Jan Foster to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The sale of Gloucestershire Airport seems increasingly uncertain, yet earlier this month the leader of Gloucester City Council was reported as saying that “nothing has been worked out” with regard to a plan B, but options were available.

Have the councils started to work on a plan B yet and if so, what options are they considering?

Member response

Thank you for the question. Cheltenham Borough Council, alongside joint shareholder Gloucester City Council, have been unable to reach agreement with Horizon Aero Group (HAG). The councils are disappointed that we were unable to accept the terms put forward by HAG.

It is important that the shareholding councils maintain close contact with operators, tenants and stakeholders and will now explore alternative options.

As Leader, I understand and appreciate that this will be a cause for concern for all those working at the airport and for business owners who operate from there.

It would be premature to talk about alternative options until we have engaged further with the current Board and employees at the airport and had meaningful discussions with businesses and operators to listen to their views so we can draw up proposals for the way forward.

Supplementary question

It is noted that the councils are planning to consult with those directly involved with the airport about its future, but aside from the financial losses, the airport is a major contributor to noise and carbon emissions, with a wide impact. Are there any plans to consult with the wider public on what they would like the future of the site to be?

Leader response

It is too early to say how wide the consultation will be at this stage. CBC gave the Leader authority to sell the airport, and whatever comes next will have to be brought back to Council for approval. Until there are some options, I cannot say what the wider consultation will be. It's unlikely everyone will agree, and there will always be concerns about noise and emissions, but there are businesses operating successfully from there and important to the economy.

9 Second Confirming Resolution Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill

Introducing the item, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm said that following Members' agreement in November 2025 to promote the Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill, it was duly deposited in parliament in line with statutory requirements, and has progressed well and unopposed. It will be considered by a Commons select committee tomorrow (24 March), then proceed to the reports stage, and conclude its scrutiny with a third reading in the House of Commons.

A quirk of this private bill procedure is the requirement of the promoting local authority to pass a confirmatory resolution after the bill is deposited in Parliament, the rationale being to allow the opportunity to reconsider the position once the deposit has taken place. The confirmatory resolution must be approved at a meeting of Full Council.

A Member pointed out that the date of the Equality Impact Assessment was not properly displayed. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm confirmed that this would be corrected.

There was no debate.

The Mayor thanked the Head of Public Protection and the OneLegal team for all their work getting this through the bureaucratic process and back to Council.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the resolution of this Council passed at a meeting of the Council held on Monday 17 November 2025 to promote a Bill in the present Session of Parliament, pursuant to which the Bill, entitled "A Bill to make provision for the repeal of section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 and for connected purposes", has been deposited in Parliament, is hereby confirmed.**

Unanimous

10 Capital, Investment, Treasury Management Strategies 2026/27

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, the Leader introduced the report, which presents the council's Capital, Investments and Treasury Managements strategies for 2026-27, and explains how the council plans to manage its money, assets and investments in coming financial year. She said the strategies are prepared in line with guidance from the Chartered institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the statutory framework set by DHCLG, helping to ensure we continue to follow good practice in financial planning and governance.

The strategies set out how the council will use its capital resources responsibly to support our key priorities for the town, including the local economy, regeneration, and long-term sustainability, and show how the council will manage its existing assets and investments so that they continue to provide value and support the essential services on which our residents rely.

The report demonstrates the council's careful and balanced approach to managing public finances, continuing to invest in projects to secure and deliver benefits for residents and the future economy

The documents and figures are informed by the budget, and will in future years come forward at the budget-setting meeting, not possible this year as the finance team had to prioritise dealing with last-minute changes arising from the government's 3-year settlement. All details can be found in the budget papers approved last month.

Questions

A Member asked how the war in the Middle East might impact on council finances. The Leader said the response to that was multi-faceted – there are potential financial risks for the council, and we are and will continue to mitigate these wherever possible:

- the main areas of concern are the direct impact on the cost of energy and fuel. The council is already buying gas and electricity supplies through a broker, mitigating significant fluctuations in price by buying with others. Electricity is less exposed; gas is impacted more, but prices had already been fixed to the end of May before the start of the conflict; the price fluctuation is starting to calm and the broker will continue to monitor the situation;
- fuel prices are being affected, and represent significant costs particularly in relation to contracts around waste management. We are seeking mitigation through fleet management and buying power;
- regarding borrowing and interest costs, we are working with the latest marketing information. Borrowing is spread over short- and longer-term periods as part of the ongoing treasury management package, with the impact monitored and managed throughout year and reported back to Council and Cabinet in the usual way. The current situation may mean the proportion of short to long-term borrowing may change to reflect different risks, but we are taking proper financial advice on our approach;
- the costs of goods and services is also subject to indirect pressure, but we are making the best use of procurement functions and frameworks when buying supplies, to ensure we manage our money well.

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

- she could not confirm the present occupancy rate of the MX but will provide a written response after the meeting;
- not capitalising expenditure under £10k and charging this to the revenue budget is standard practice in district council finances.

A Member asked about the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Policy, saying councillors are regularly lobbied about investment in tobacco, any

investments that might prolong the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, and the council's investment policy around ESG. He wondered if there are any plans to take a closer look at these issues. The Leader confirmed that the council does not invest in tobacco, and is continually looking to avoid investments in areas it would prefer to avoid; it has a small amount invested in fuel, and has committed to seeing another investment through to the end of its term unless the markets change, as it would cost £450k to de-invest.

She added that CBC has no control over its pensions investments.

Debate

A Member commented that, compared with other towns facing the same local and national issues as Cheltenham, CBC does very well in providing both mandatory and non-mandatory frontline services. He said this is due to the excellent management of the finance team and officers who continue to do such a great job in running our finances.

The Leader also thanked all the officers who manage CBC's finances on our behalf, and thanked Members for their questions and comments.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the Capital Strategy 2026/27 at Appendix 2 is approved;**
- **the Investment Strategy 2026/27 at Appendix 3 is approve; and**
- **the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27 at Appendix 4 is approved.**

32 in support, 1 abstention

11 Notice of Motions

There were none.

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

There were no urgent items.

As this was the last meeting of Full Council before the elections in May, the Leader thanked the Mayor for a good and busy year. The Mayor thanked the Leader and all Members for making it easy, senior officers, Democratic Services team, Jennie Ingram, and all officers who come in to support Cabinet and Council when required.