

Cabinet
19/June2023



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 19 June 2023.

Councillors present:

Joe Harris - Chair
Tony Dale
Lisa Spivey

Mike Evemy – Vice Chair
Claire Bloomer
Paul Hodgkinson

Mike McKeown

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Jan Britton, Managing Director - Publica
Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business
Manager
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services
Officer

Ana Prelici, Democratic Services
Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for
Environmental, Welfare and Revenue Service
Charlie Jackson, Assistant Director - Planning
and Sustainability
Chris Kent, Revenues Manager
Phil Shaw, Business Manager - Development
Management

Observers:

Councillors David Fowles, Nikki Ind, Angus Jenkinson and Jeremy Theyer

122 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Layton.

123 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

There were no declarations of interest from Officers.

124 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 13th March 2023 be
APPROVED as a correct record.

Voting Record - 3 For, 0 Against, 3 Abstention, 2 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
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Joe Harris		Claire Bloomer	Juliet Layton
Mike Evemy		Lisa Spivey	Mike McKeown
Tony Dale		Paul Hodgkinson	

125 Chair's Announcements

The Leader noted the raising of the flag ceremony that had taken place at the Council Offices and the sacrifices the Armed Forces make for civilian operations as well as military operations.

The Leader made reference to Pride Month and the importance of supporting to protect the rights of all people.

126 Public Questions

There no public questions.

127 Member Questions

A Member Question was submitted Councillor Twells and a written response was provided directly to the Member as requested and published as an additional document to the agenda.

128 Business Rates Discretionary Relief (exceeding £10,000)

The purpose of the report was to consider three renewal applications in respect of Discretionary Rate Relief, each in excess of £10,000 for the 2022/23 Business Rates liability.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Finance introduced the report and explained that this report was required to come to a meeting of the whole Cabinet as the amount of discretionary relief was over £10,000. This was beyond the protocols for an Individual Cabinet Member Decision Meeting

It was noted that this was for the operations of the leisure centre in Bourton-on-the-Water and the Leisure Centre and Corinium Museum under contract by SLM Everyone Active in Cirencester for the 21/22 Financial Year.

It was outlined that Paragraph 2.5 stated that the contract was signed on the assumption that the relief would be granted. Therefore the relief being granted would honour the leisure contract commitments to SLM Everyone Active.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) APPROVED the Discretionary Rate Relief applications in respect of the Corinium Museum, Bourton Leisure Centre and Cotswold Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre.

Voting Record - 6 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 2 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			Mike McKeown

Lisa Spivey			
Mike Evemy			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

129 Business Rates Discretionary Relief Reconsideration

The purpose of the report was to reconsider an application for Discretionary Rate Relief submitted under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1998 for the financial year 2021/22.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report.

It was outlined that the policy of the Council was not to blanket grant relief but to consider the assets of the organisations applying for relief.

It was noted that at the time of the decision meeting on 9th May 2022, the information supplied to the Deputy Leader was sufficient to indicate there were the financial resources to cover the business rates.

It was outlined that that new information on the reserve amount of £68,000 which was 3-6 months operating costs supplied by the applicant, had led to the recommendation to reconsider the original decision to refuse relief.

It was noted that £561.81 was the Council's share of the rate relief in the recommendation as set out in paragraph 4.1.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

a) APPROVED the reconsideration of the original decision not to award a Discretionary Rate Relief submitted under S47; and approve the relief of £1,404.53

Voting Record - 6 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 2 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			Mike McKeown
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Evemy			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

130 Hybrid Mail contract award

The purpose of the report was to consider the results of a procurement exercise to award a new contract for the provision of external printing and postage for the council and its partners

The Leader of the Council invited the Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service as the accountable officer.

It was outlined that following the procurement exercise, that the Cabinet was asked to consider the awarding of a contract to IMail to deliver external printing and posting on behalf of the Council.

It was outlined that 'hybrid mail' was a type of mail where the process of printing, enveloping and posting of mail is done by an external company on behalf of the council.

In paragraph 4.2, it was noted that an initial saving of £12,000 was outlined in comparison to continuing with the current arrangement with Royal Mail, with further savings anticipated later down the track as consumables and printer usage are reduced.

It was outlined that the contract would be for 3 years plus one year.

The Leader of the Council noted that the Council had approached officers about savings that could be made by challenging existing practices.

It was outlined that this was a good example of delivering savings at a time when budgets would be constrained

Following a question about the protection of personal information, it was noted that companies carrying out this service would have to adhere to GDPR and this would be built into the contract.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that as part of the Budget approved in February 2023 there was £20,000 removed from the bottom line based on the original business case assumption for the contract. Therefore it was important the quarterly financial monitoring reports track the savings so they remain on target.

Councillor Jenkinson as an observer asked about suppliers in the region and whether these had been considered. It was explained by the officer that this contract was decided as part of the procurement framework and if a local company was not part of the listed companies, it would not be considered.

The Leader noted that issues around local suppliers not always being considered within the framework local authorities have to adhere to, is something that the Council would continue to challenge.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1) **APPROVED** the contract for external printing and postage from 1 August 2023 to Imail for a period of 3 plus the option of a 1 year extension.

Voting Record - 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 1 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			

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Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

131 Write off in excess of £5,000 relating to a business

The purpose of the report was to seek the approval of Cabinet for the writing off of business rates debts in excess of £5,000.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member introduced the report and outlined how this was a follow on from a previous decision taken on 7 December 2020. The previous decision was relating to the collection of outstanding business rates and the final settlement agreement to secure the repayment of £75,307.27 which removed secured charges of £100,034.71.

It was outlined that the decision taken at the time was part of the advice given by the Insolvency Practitioner who was instructed to recover the monies owed.

It was noted that four additional properties that should have been considered as part of the settlement agreement but it was not presented at the time of the original report.

It was therefore asked that Cabinet approve the write-off of £11,384.40 in the outstanding accounts as the monies would not be obtained.

Following Cabinet Member questions about any future potential opportunities to secure the money, it was noted that this was not possible in this case due to the settlement agreement with the company

RESOLVED: That Cabinet APPROVED the write off of the outstanding accounts totalling £11,384.40

Voting Record - 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 1 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

132 Development Management Improvement Programme

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress against Phases I and II of the DM Improvement Programme and make recommendations for further improvements (Phase III), following the Planning Advisory Service report.

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As the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services had given apologies, The Business Manager for Planning and Sustainability introduced the report to Cabinet.

It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee did pre-scrutinise this item but did not provide any recommendations to Cabinet.

It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic measures and a 40% increase in workload for officers had caused the drop in service performance.

It was highlighted in paragraph 2.3 that an action plan had been created following discussions from management in Publica and the Chief Executive in 2021 which set out changes to improve the overall service.

It was noted that there was sustained improvement over the past six quarters in terms of the targets set out and customer satisfaction levels.

The report had come to Cabinet as there were also areas which required political approval as detailed in paragraph 5.0 onwards. It was also noted that the measures outlined were part of the best practice from the Planning Advisory Service.

It was noted that the Constitution Working Group would examine the proposals regarding the processes for the Review Panel, and then put recommendations to Council.

It was noted that the background context of planning services is that local authorities nationally were under pressure due to historic budget constraints. Furthermore, the strict planning policies within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are a unique challenge for the Council.

It was also noted that whilst there were frustrations within the National Planning Policy Framework, but that this was the legislation the Council had to abide by in fulfilling its statutory duty.

The Chief Executive noted a request for communications around the Development Management Improvement Plan if it was endorsed.

The improvements around the use of officer resources which had allowed them to process applications more efficiently was welcomed.

It was noted that the improvement of enforcement with the introduction of a 'harms checklist has helped to reduce the backlog of cases.

It was noted that there were still issues around getting responses from statutory consultees to planning applications, and work needed to be done to encourage participation.

It was welcomed by Cabinet about the protocol regarding negotiations which should help strengthen the position of officers determining applications.

Councillor Ind as an observer noted that residents are not being kept updated on enforcement matters, and there could perhaps communication points built within the checklist. It was noted by the officer that there would be a series of new customer journey to give residents the information they need.

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Councillor Jenkinson as an observer and a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked about enforcement in the northern part of the Cotswold District. It was noted by the officer that case officers would be allocated specific areas where possible to improve communication with residents, without compromising on the performance of enforcement practice.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet AGREED to:

- 1) NOTE the improvement progress to date, and
- 2) APPROVE the changes detailed in paragraph 5.1

Voting Record - 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 1 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

133 Green Economic Growth Strategy Six Monthly Update

The purpose of the report was to update Cabinet Members on the progress in delivering the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation introduced the report.

It was noted that the Council's economic strategy had been much developed since 2019.

Some key projects such as the Innovation Village and ZeroAvia were noted by Cabinet as being key to promoting sustainable economic growth in the District.

There were also infrastructure improvements such as the A417 'Missing Link' which would help to support economic growth in the district.

The officer outlined that the third recommendation would help to provide more frequent updates to Members away from the Cabinet agenda.

It was noted that access to housing was important and that this should be part of the economic strategy. The Cabinet Member highlighted the work done by the Royal Agricultural University and others to encourage young people to stay within the District.

In response to questions around the differences in economic differences between the north and south of the district, the Cabinet Member highlighted projects around the Fire Services College and green industries.

There were questions around changes to the high street, and ensuring these shops meet the needs of residents. In response, the Cabinet Member recognised the challenges of the high

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street but pointed to innovations with local businesses and highlighted how the Council is working to support them have an active e-commerce presence.

It was also noted how the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had changed the approach to tourism and the impact of visitor information centres within the District.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That progress in delivering the Green Economic Growth Strategy is NOTED.
- 2) That Cabinet AGREED to a review and refresh of the Strategy is undertaken in light of progress to date, the Administration's priorities following the elections in May 2023 and the emerging Gloucestershire Economic Strategy.
- 3) That Cabinet AGREED to future updates on the Green Economic Growth Strategy being dealt with via Member briefings rather than a report to Cabinet, unless a formal decision is required.

Voting Record - 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 1 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

134 Schedule of Decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and/or Individual Cabinet Members

Cabinet NOTED the schedule of decisions taken as presented.

135 Issue(s) Arising from Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit

There were no issues arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Audit Committee.

136 Matters exempt from publication

The Leader announced that Item 16 would be considered in public session, as the exemption applied to the agenda item was relating to a deceased individual. Therefore, it was deemed that the information regarding the write-off could be discussed in open session.

137 Write off in excess of £5,000 relating to an individual

The purpose of the report was to seek the approval of Cabinet for the writing off of council tax debt in excess of £5,000.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report.

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The circumstances of the deceased individual were outlined to Cabinet, and that the outstanding amount of £7306.65 could not be recovered from an estate. This was because the contact details for a next of kin was not known.

The Deputy Leader did reassure however that if any information emerges regarding a residual estate, the Council would make a claim against this for the Council Tax liability.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1) APPROVED the write off of £7306.65 as detailed within the report

Voting Record - 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention, 1 Did not vote/absent

For	Against	Abstention	Did not vote/absent
Claire Bloomer			Juliet Layton
Joe Harris			
Lisa Spivey			
Mike Every			
Mike McKeown			
Paul Hodgkinson			
Tony Dale			

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.30 pm

Chair

(END)