



## MINUTES OF COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

DATE: Wednesday 15 February 2023 TIME: 10.00 am

VENUE:

### Present

#### Membership:

Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin	Cllr Rebecca Halifax	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Matt Babbage	Cllr Tim Harman	Cllr Alan Preest (Chair)
Cllr Paul Baker	Cllr Joe Harris	Cllr Philip Robinson
Cllr John Bloxson	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Cllr Steve Robinson
Cllr David Brown	Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Vernon Smith
Cllr Alastair Chambers	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Cllr Lisa Spivey
Cllr Cate Cody	Cllr Stephen Hirst (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Lynden Stowe
Cllr Linda Cohen	Cllr Paul Hodgkinson	Cllr Wendy Thomas
Cllr Stephen Davies	Cllr Beki Hoyland	Cllr Brian Tipper
Cllr David Drew	Cllr Chris McFarling	Cllr Pam Tracey MBE
Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Stephan Fifield	Cllr Graham Morgan	Cllr Robert Vines
Cllr Bernard Fisher	Cllr Dom Morris	Cllr Roger Whyborn
Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE	Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Kathy Williams
Cllr David Gray	Cllr Emma Nelson	Cllr Susan Williams
Cllr Terry Hale	Cllr David Norman MBE	

Lesley Williams (Honorary Alderwoman)

Apologies: Cllr Phil Awford, Cllr Alex Hegenbarth, Cllr Nick Housden, Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington, Cllr Suzanne Williams and Cllr Dr David Willingham  
Honorary Alderman: Gordon Shurmer, Bill Crowther and John Cordwell

### 116. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### 117. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Andrew Miller declared an interest as a foster carer at GCC.

### 118. ANNOUNCEMENTS

a) Queen's New Year's Honours list

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The Chairman congratulated the people living in Gloucestershire who had received awards as part of the Queen's New Year Honours

b) The Care Leavers Awards evening

The Chair invited all members to attend the Care Leavers Awards evening which was to be held at Kingsholm Rugby Stadium on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March.

c) Steve Tilley, former Parish Councillor for Slimbridge

A round of applause was given to recognise Steve Tilley having completed his 4000 mile walk around the coasts of England and Wales in the effort to raise £10,000 for the charity Mind.

## **119. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

56 public questions had been submitted prior to the meeting. The following supplementary questions were asked:

Question 1 – David Redgewell asked what progress was being made on setting up the Bus Service Improvement Advisory Board and the Passenger Forum.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that a draft agreement for the Partnership was expected to be signed off by 22<sup>nd</sup> February and the first meetings expected to take place in Spring. The Passenger Forum was a requirement as part of the Enhanced Partnership.

Question 2 – David Redgewell asked whether extra money would be provided to cover the cost to the operators of concessionary fares.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the intention was to keep the concessionary fare reimbursement at 90% of pre-Covid-19 levels which was above the 75% of pre-Pandemic concessionary usage. They were expecting a commitment from operators to maintain network stability as part of this over subsidising.

Question 3 – David Redgewell asked what pressure was being put on Secretary of State Mark Harper to maintain the Covid-19 Bus Operator Recovery Grant.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the Secretary of State took bus transport seriously and discussions were in place to improve the bus service for rural counties.

Question 4 – David Redgewell asked when the Gloucestershire Transport Hub would be fully re-opened in terms of shops, cafes and fixed Bus-Rail Integration signage and whether it would be possible to facilitate this with Gloucester City Council.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that there were different responsibilities from different bodies with regards the Transport Hub and that he would have a discussion with the Integrated Transport Unit about discussions with the City Council to approach these concerns.

Question 5 – David Redgewell raised concern over the bus routes that were being affected by service cutbacks such as the Wotton-under-Edge buses 84 and 95 and the Stroud number 67.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that those were commercial routes that were being cut by Stagecoach and that the Council had pleaded with Stagecoach to avoid these cuts. Parts of the 67 route would be maintained as it was supported by County subsidisation and buses were still expected to run with a 60 minute frequency. The 84 and 85 services were run by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), so these conversations were ongoing.

Question 6 – David Redgewell asked about the installation of lifts at Cheltenham Spa Railway Station and the business case for the Stonehouse Bristol Road Station.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the written explanation provided was all that was available at the moment, but that Mr Redgewell was welcome to follow up further via email.

Question 8 – Lorna Parker expressed concern over the lack of seating or passenger information screens at Merrywalks bus stops

Cllr Philip Robinson thanked the member of the public for bringing the issue to his attention and said he would investigate. He expressed particular concern for real time passenger information for those bus routes that have a less frequent service.

Question 19 – Jenny Inglis explained that bus cuts were affecting the lives of her and her family. She raised that buses were proposed to become the de-facto choice for all transport requirements by GCC and that this was not in line with only raising bus subsidies in line with inflation. She asked if the Council would commit to look at increasing funding for buses.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the Council was committed to the Bus Service Improvement Plan but were unsuccessful with its bid for £40 million of Government funding. Due to being unsuccessful with that bid, and the inflationary pressures that were being experienced nationally, they were only able to keep funding in line with inflation. The Council would try its best with what it had but providing a single bus with one driver on weekdays would cost at least £250,000 and picking up the cost of maintaining the Arle Court Park and Ride service from Stagecoach had already cost the County Council a significant amount and much more would be required to increase bus provision.

Question 20 – Jenny Inglis asked if there were any bus service contracts that were due for renewal.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that there were many contracts for bus service provision, sometimes multiple within one route and these were monitored via a rolling programme. The County's responsibility for public transport was to provide stability in the network which is why it was helpful to have longer term contracts.

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Question 23 – Jenny Inglis noted that citizens in London had three times more spend per head than in Gloucestershire and asked why more could not be spent on buses here.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the comparison with London needed to take into account population density which would explain the spending disparity.

Question 27 – Lorna Parker asked why buses in West Yorkshire had maximum £2 rates for singles and £4.50 for day savers but Gloucestershire did not.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the £2 single fare cap had been introduced nationally by the government and that it had been taken up by Stagecoach in Gloucestershire.

Question 47 – Adrian Oldman asked whether the Cabinet Member would be willing to meet with the residents to discuss bus cuts.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that he was as frustrated about the cuts by Stagecoach as residents were. The Council had taken all steps to implore Stagecoach to stop cutting more rural routes, going so far as to report Stagecoach to the Traffic Commission. It was explained that Gloucestershire County Council was not in the position to keep funding replacement services. The member was happy to meet with those members of the public affected, ideally with representatives from Stagecoach present.

## **120. CORPORATE PARENTING**

Cllr Stephen Davies, Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years, presented the Corporate Parenting Report.

He explained that the story of Children’s Services was often about making and holding gains in performance, whilst continuing to work on areas of improvement and the attached report reflected this journey well.

There had been a reduction in staff turnover and vacancy rates, but the rate for agency staff remained at 35%. The number of social workers with fewer than 18 cases rose from 13% to 35% and over 92% had 23 cases or less. In December an additional payment of £200 was paid to fostering household to help with the cost-of-living crisis.

It was highlighted that there was an awards evening for Care Leavers on 22 March 2023 and as Corporate Parents, all members were invited to attend.

## **121. PETITIONS**

No petitions were presented.

## **122. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

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The report before members included the budget recommendations, Medium Term Financial Strategy, budget consultation report, scrutiny budget report and due regard statement.

The Chief Executive explained the procedure that would be followed at the meeting. First, Cllr Lynden Stowe, Cabinet Member for Finance and Change, and Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, Leader of the Council, and would be asked to present the recommendations from the Cabinet.

Second, in order to reach a position where a substantive motion could be debated, the other political groups would be invited to propose amendments to the budget but there would be no debate at that stage. This would be a departure from the normal procedure where only one amendment could be moved and discussed at any one time.

Once the amendments had been presented, the Chair would call for an adjournment to provide an opportunity for the Group Leaders to reach a common position.

After the adjournment, the Leader of the Council would advise members of those areas where it had been possible to reach agreement. Any amendments which had not been accepted or withdrawn would then be presented by the groups, debated and voted upon.

Thereafter all members would have an opportunity to debate the budget in line with the normal rules of debate. At the end of the debate, the Leader of the Council would sum up.

Finally, a recorded vote would be proposed by the Chair, and seconded by the Vice Chair, on any remaining budget amendments and the substantive budget itself.

The Chair therefore proposed that under procedure rule 23.1 the following part of procedure rule 12.5 be suspended for the duration of the budget debate:

‘Only one amendment may be moved and discussed at any one time. No further amendment may be moved until the amendment under discussion has been dealt with.’

*The Vice-chair seconded the motion and, on being put to the vote, the motion was unanimously supported.*

### **Conservative Group**

Cllr Lynden Stowe, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Change, and Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, the Leader of the Council, and presented the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 25 January 2023.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Change informed the meeting that in addition to the proposals agreed on 25 January 2023 the Conservative Group were submitting one amendment:

	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Repeating or one-off?</b>	<b>2021/22 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Funded from</b>
1	Additional resources for TRO resolutions	One Off	150	Revenue

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Change firstly wished to thank all the officers who had been involved in the formulation of this budget over several months. Secondly, he thanked members across the chamber for their input through the scrutiny process, he recognised the comments received had been most useful in helping to fine tune the detail. The Cabinet Member wished to thank members of the public, stakeholders and staff, for taking the time to provide consultation responses.

It was noted that comments from scrutiny, the consultation responses and the Equality Impact Assessments were included within report.

He explained that Gloucestershire's settlement from government was a very pragmatic one, which had enabled the administration to put forward this budget today, and in turn, deliver its core services.

The Council revenue budget would increase from £521 million to £566 million, an increase of £45 million which was proportionately the biggest increase for ten years. Central government's funding as a proportion of the budget was at its highest for six years.

However, in order to continue to deliver essential, statutory services, it was with a heavy heart that he asked for members to support an increase in council tax of 2.99% for next year, together with a further 2% Adult Social Care Levy. That would represent an extra £1.39 a week for a Band D council tax. It was added that the total increase was lower than inflation, lower than the increase in pensions and lower than most pay-settlements this year.

There were a number of budget increases outlined in the report, but he wanted to highlight the following in particular:

- An 11.4% increase in the Adult Social Care budget amounting to nearly £19 million extra.
- An increase for Children in Care and Children's Services of 12.3%, over £17 million more. Additionally, the administration was creating a Children's Services Special Revenue Reserve of £6.2 million to mitigate potential in-year volatility in the placement market and demand.
- The Highways Maintenance base budget would increase by 22%, which was the biggest annual increase seen for the Council.

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The Cabinet Member highlighted that the Capital Budget for 23/24 was now £235 million which included £45 million of new spend investing in the future of Gloucestershire. The Conservative Group had also submitted an amendment which proposed a £150,000 one-off allocation to help ease the backlog on Traffic Regulation Orders.

Whilst he had not explicitly referred to it, he wanted to assure council, the public, and communities that this administration was committed to doing whatever it could, across all its services to help mitigate climate change.

He summarised that after the uncertainty of this past year, he believed, that in front of members, there was a pragmatic and positive budget to support the people of Gloucestershire and it was his privilege to propose it today.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, seconded the proposal and advised Council the budget was the continuation of a 4-year strategy to improve the lives of residents in our county, to meet climate change ambitions and to support the continued growth of the economy, while delivering a green and more prosperous future.

Last year, the administration set out plans to help communities “Build Back Better”, and as a result, it had supported over 60 community events in market towns up and down the County, helping them bounce back after Covid and giving a real boost to local economies.

This year the focus had shifted to supporting the most deprived communities, through the £1.5m Levelling Up Fund. The Leader added that it had been a pleasure to work with passionate, hardworking, and knowledgeable local members to understand the needs of their communities, while making sure that funding would get to where it was needed the most.

Over the next 12 months, the administration would continue to look at ways they could work with partners and play their part to help tackle inequality and to Build Back Better for everyone. He added that Gloucestershire was a great place to live and that’s why over the last couple of years, it had become a safe haven for those fleeing conflict and seeking refuge.

In total GCC had supported over 2,500 people through the Syrian, Afghanistan and Ukrainian resettlement schemes, which would not have been possible without the fantastic help and support of residents, particularly the 1000 hosts that supported 1500 Ukrainian guests. While the Council played its part with funding, it was these hosts that had made the real difference, and on behalf of the Council he wished to thank them.

He reminded members that the Fire Service continued on its improvement journey, which they had already made huge strides in, and this budget would continue to support them through this. This budget also continued to support Children’s Services on their journey including investing to support the most vulnerable children in our communities.

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The Leader wished to put on record his thanks to all those who worked in adult social care over the winter pressures, often the unsung heroes supporting the NHS, for their tremendous professionalism and dedication shown on behalf of all residents in Gloucestershire.

The administration continued to stand up for communities against the Stagecoach cuts, and to innovate with schemes such as The Robin being trialled in the Forest of Dean and North Cotswolds. There were a number of major schemes being delivered such as Arle Court Transport Hub, Llanthony road improvements, 26 miles of cycleway and M5 Junction 10 improvements. Work also continued to put Gloucestershire on the global map for cyber tech and security via the Cyber Park scheme.

The Leader summarised that this budget was a budget that continued to deliver for residents, against our green agenda and for the most vulnerable in our communities. It was a budget that delivered for Gloucestershire, and he commended it to the Council.

### **Liberal Democrat Group**

Cllr Ben Evans proposed and Cllr Colin Hay seconded the amendments from the Liberal Democrat Group:

	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Repeating or one-off?</b>	<b>2023/24 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Funded from</b>
1	Behavioural research and pilot interventions around alcohol consumption	One off	75	Revenue
2	Doubling the PROW Budget	One off	25	Revenue
3	Children's Services - spend to save review, including the recommendations of the MacAlister report "the independent review of children's social care"	One off	75	Revenue
4	Road safety - bring forward capital spend	One off	400	Taken from £500,000 slippage in County Offices Cheltenham - Refurb and Reconfiguration
5	Grit bin fund	One off	80	Revenue
6	Footpath resurfacing	One off	100	Capital

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Cllr Evans first paid thanks on behalf his group to lead officers and their teams for their hard work, diligence, and skill in producing this budget work. In introducing their amendments, Cllr Evans explained that they sat within 3 key priorities: improving the county's roads; protecting and supporting the environment people live in; and supporting people's services for those who need them.

The Group's amendment for road safety allocated additional money for the implementation of the new Road Safety Policy, hoping this would result in a faster and more effective process to start reducing the number of fatalities on our roads. He was also pleased to introduce a joint amendment with colleagues in the Labour Group for a designated budget to allow communities to build the number, and the resilience of grit bins available. The recent adverse weather experienced had emphasised the need for community resource.

For the second priority, the Group had put forward an amendment to double the Public Rights of Way budget, enabling the team to do more to improve walking routes and their accessibility. There was also a proposed £100,000 allocation for pavement improvements, which residents had shared were causing access difficulties in some areas.

Cllr Evans introduced an amendment to run a pilot looking at the link between problematic drinking and social isolation. This was viewed as a "spend to save" project and, if accepted, they looked forward to seeing the results both in terms of improved outcomes for people, and cost savings for stretched public health budgets. Their final amendment was a small contribution towards a review that could highlight key preventative steps the Council could take to reduce the number of children who needed to enter the care system.

Looking towards the budget as a whole, Cllr Evans stressed that they could not support it. They felt this was not a growth budget, it had grown by £45m but this was only to keep up with the demands of the current economic climate. He made reference to the many financial hardships that residents were facing, which they believed were due to financial mismanagement and misunderstanding within national and local government.

He hoped the Liberal Democrat amendments were accepted and acted upon. He felt they were a positive attempt to listen to people and make improvements to the current budget.

Cllr Hay seconded the proposals and again thanked officers for their efforts, and also the other political groups for the constructive and amicable dialogue that had taken place during the budget setting process. He agreed with previous comments and felt the Council should have been investing in areas in order to reduce demand, in particular children's and adult's services. He agreed that it was important to invest in the fire service but also felt it had diminished over the years due to the lack of investment.

Cllr Hay summarised that today's budget was probably as good as it would get in the current climate but given the chance, his Group would have done things differently.

## Labour Group

Cllr John Bloxsom proposed and Cllr Wendy Thomas seconded the amendments from the Labour Group:

	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Repeating or one-off?</b>	<b>2023/24 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Funded from</b>
1	Footpath resurfacing	One off	100	Capital
2	Scrapping disabled parking permits	One off	43	Revenue
3	Grant funding to develop community transport providers	One off	70	Revenue
4	Youth Work	One off	159	Revenue
5	Severe weather planning and community preparations	One off	65	Revenue
6	Provision of more grit bins	One off	80	Revenue

Councillor Bloxsom thanked officers for their help in the budget setting process and felt constructive dialogue had taken place regarding the amendments.

Giving an overview of the Group's amendments, Cllr Bloxsom referred to the recent adverse weather experienced in December 2022 which had highlighted the gaps in community access to grit bins. He was pleased to welcome a joint amendment with the Liberal Democrats. This was in addition to an amendment around severe weather planning and community preparation, again recently highlighted throughout December 2022. They felt there needed to be a more proactive process and hoped GCC could work with partner agencies and Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils going forward.

Disabled parking permits were currently charged at £80 which the Group felt should be reduced by half and that a budget provision should be made available for other access improvements such as dropped kerbs. The Group also put forward an amendment aimed at providing resource for officers to explore alternative community transport options, particularly in light of the recent Stagecoach cuts. They recognised this would not be an immediate solution but would help to begin to address some of the issues.

In relation to youth work, Cllr Bloxsom proposed an amendment, which would provide the equivalent of £3k per division to fund some preventative youth work which they felt had been lost over the years.

Considering the wider budget, Cllr Bloxsom regretted the fact that there was a need to raise council tax but recognised that the County Council network had said most councils were using the freedom that was available to them to increase the council tax and the adult social care levy. He felt there was a need for national change, to reform the regressive nature of the council tax, whereby lower income households proportionately paid a higher proportion of their income in council tax, compared to

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those who had more capital and wealth. In addition, he felt eventually business rates should be scrapped as they were damaging the high streets and in particular our small and independent shops. He felt in real terms, there was going to be a reduction in services, noting the many discussions today on cuts to bus services and this budget would not stop these changes.

Councillor Thomas seconded the proposal and wished to share her thanks to officers over the budget setting process and felt constructive conversations had taken place.

In terms of the amendments from the Labour Group, Councillor Thomas wished to highlight a couple which would make a real difference to residents in the county. Firstly, reducing the application fee for disabled parking bays, particularly in light of the current cost of living crisis. Secondly, Councillor Thomas was pleased to support the amendment for youth funding, as this would allow councillors to engage with their community and support local groups. She also felt that the funding for research into community transport was an important step in the right direction to ensure a more robust service that was no longer in the hands of commercial suppliers. Cllr Thomas hoped that these modest amendments would be accepted.

### **Green Group**

Councillor Cate Cody and Councillor Chloe Turner proposed the amendments from the Green Group.

	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Repeating or one-off?</b>	<b>2023/24 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Funded from</b>
1	E Bike Hire Scheme	23/24 & 24/25	150	Revenue
2	Secure Bike storage solutions	one off	90	Revenue
3	Support for Rivers task Group	one off	100	Revenue
4	Rights of way	one off	60	Revenue

Councillor Cody again wished to thank officers for their support and advised Council of the four amendments on a range of projects that would help the council meet its environmental commitments and help protect the natural landscape.

The first was an e-bike hire scheme which allowed residents to trial e-bike ownership over a number of months. She explained that studies had shown those who trialled e-bikes were significantly more likely to want one in the longer term and they were particularly suited to more rural and hilly areas where there weren't suitable, safe, or separated cycling options. This was in addition to an amendment to fund secure bike storage hangers for public use.

The third amendment supported the outcomes of a recent County Council report by the Restoring our Rivers Task Group by providing resource for a part-time officer or

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an ecology firm to project manage and support implementation of the task group's recommendations.

Councillor Cody explained their fourth amendment sought to support the important work of the Public Rights of Way team, by significantly increasing their budgets to routinely maintain our networks, footpaths, and other rights of way during the forthcoming year.

Councillor Turner seconded the proposal and appreciated the constructive dialogue that had led to these amendments, she also wished to thank officers for the production of the budget. She recognised it was a difficult time for many and in the increased threat of climate change, she hoped the amendments would be accepted.

The Chair adjourned the meeting from 11.27am to 11:50am for Group Leaders to discuss amendments and identify areas of agreement.

### **Debate on the Budget Amendments**

Following the adjournment, Cllr Hawthorne set out the position of the Conservative Group in relation to the budget amendments put forward by the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Groups.

The following were accepted as friendly amendments to the budget proposal:

<b>Political Group</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>2023/24 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Revenue or Capital</b>	<b>Agreed or Revised</b>	<b>Approved or Revised Figure</b>
Green	E Bike Hire Scheme	150	Revenue	Agreed	150
Green	Secure Bike storage solution	90	Revenue	Agreed	90
Green	Support for Rivers Task Group	100	Revenue	Agreed	100
Green/Labour	Rights of way	100	Revenue	Agreed	100
Lib Dem	Behavioural research and pilot interventions around alcohol consumption	75	Revenue	Agreed	75
Lib Dem	Doubling the PROW budget	25	Revenue	Agreed	25
Lib Dem	Children's Services - spend to save review of the recommendations of the MacAlister report "the	75	Revenue	Agreed	75

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	independent review of children's social care"				
Lib Dem	Road safety - bring forward capital spend	400	Capital	Agreed	400
Lib Dem	Footway resurfacing	100	Capital	Agreed	100
Lib Dem/Labour	Grit bin fund	80	Revenue	Agreed	80
Labour	Reducing cost of disabled parking permits	43	Revenue	Agreed	43
Labour	Grant funding to develop community transport providers	70	Revenue	Agreed	70
Labour	Youth work	159	Revenue	Agreed	159
Labour	Severe weather planning and community preparations	65	Revenue	Agreed	65
Conservatives	Additional resources for TRO resolutions	150	Revenue	Agreed	150

This reflected all the amendments that had been put forward and therefore none were left unsupported. The amendments totalled an additional £1182,000 revenue and £500,000 capital spend to the budget.

General debate on the budget continued.

A member welcomed the acceptance of the amendment concerning alcohol consumption. It was shared that in a recent report to Health Scrutiny, members learnt that 1/3 of the adult population in Gloucestershire were drinking more than the weekly recommended average, this was particularly high within middle class residents over 50 years old. They were also concerned that Government still had not confirmed the Public Health ring-fenced grant for local authorities.

There was concern expressed for Children's Services, which a member felt was in crisis due to the rising number of children coming into care, recruitment and retention issues and cost pressures continuing to rise. They noted that a continuous overspend was not only detrimental to the long-term planning for the Service but had a knock-on effect on other services the Council provided.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years, Cllr Stephen Davies, confirmed that Ofsted were happy the service was taking children into care

when it was appropriate and necessary to do so, the numbers coming in had stabilised, but the challenge remained as to where children moved onto after care, should that be appropriate. He accepted that a small number of children required extremely expensive packages of care, but the Council would continue to spend that money if it was the right outcome for that child. The Children's Services Stability Reserve had been set up to support these more expensive cases should it be needed.

Some members highlighted the extra funding for Traffic Regulation Orders, noting these Orders as vital in underpinning important road safety measures, and would allow members to spend their Highways Local on other improvements for their area. Another member added however that they did not think the target reduction in KSIs would be met without rolling out a considerable number of 20mph zones.

Frustration remained around the funding for bus and community transport, particularly in light of the recent Stagecoach cuts. Members referenced the number of public questions that had been submitted for this meeting from residents expressing the difficulties they had faced since these cuts. A member stated that public transport needed better funding from central Government and to be removed from private company control.

A member was disappointed that the budget appeared to contain very little to address walking. If this Council was serious about promoting active travel and Levelling Up, it needed to invest in the condition of pavements. They did however welcome the amendments for Public Rights of Way (PROW), the combined amendments allocated a significant amount of extra funds to improving the PROW network for residents.

It was noted that the Commissioning Intentions included in the budget papers reflected what Cabinet intended to deliver in the next year. It was therefore important for scrutiny members to be aware of these and engage with their Lead Cabinet Member(s) on progress in delivering them.

Members expressed their concern that central Government was not providing adequate funding for local authorities to deliver their services, particularly so considering the current level of inflation and economic climate.

Several members shared their gratitude for the way the budget setting process had been managed, and the support they had received from officers and Cabinet Members in producing and agreeing the budget amendments. Cabinet welcomed the positive contributions the amendments would make to the budget.

### **Vote on the budget**

On being put to a recorded vote, the substantive motion was carried:

**For (29):** Cllrs Carole Allaway-Martin, Matt Babbage, Alastair Chambers, Cate Cody, Stephen Davies, Stephan Fifield, Andrew Gravells MBE, David Gray, Terry Hale, Tim Harman, Mark Hawthorne MBE, Stephen Hirst, Rebekah Hoyland, Chris McFarling, Andrew Miller, Dominic Morris, Emma Nelson, Dave Norman MBE, Sajid

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Patel, Alan Preest, Philip Robinson, Vernon Smith, Lynden Stowe, Brian Tipper, Pam Tracey MBE, Chloe Turner, Robert Vines, Kathy Williams and Susan Williams.

**Abstained (18):** Cllrs Paul Baker, John Bloxson, David Brown, Linda Cohen, David Drew, Ben Evans, Bernard Fisher, Rebecca Halifax, Joe Harris, Colin Hay, Jeremy Hilton, Paul Hodgkinson, Graham Morgan, Gill Moseley, Steve Robinson, Lisa Spivey, Wendy Thomas and Roger Whyborn.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That, having considered the additional consultation responses and the Public Sector Equality Duty Due Regard Statement, approval is given to the MTFS and the revenue and capital budgets for 2023/24, council tax for each valuation band, and to issue precepts on each district collection fund as set out below:

a) Gloucestershire County Council 2023/24 Budget:

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Original 2022/23 Budget</b>	<b><u>521,330</u></b>
Removal of 2022/23 One off Investments	-11,052
<b>Revised 2022/23 Base Budget</b>	<b><u>510,278</u></b>
2023/24 Proposed Pay Inflation	15,156
2023/24 Proposed Cost and Spending Pressures	61,777
2023/24 Proposed Cost Reductions	-21,101
<b>Total 2023/24 Budget</b>	<b><u>566,110</u></b>
less:	
Top Up Grant	54,669
Business Rates Income	22,496
Revenue Support Grant	9,359
S31 Grant	9,282
Public Health Grant	26,526
Improved Better Care Fund	20,024
New Homes Bonus	849
Social Care Grant Funding	44,779
In-shore Fisheries	122
Services Grant	2,943
Collection Fund Surplus	1,961
Reserves	8,886
<b>Budget to be met by Council Tax Payers</b>	<b><u>364,214</u></b>

Total to be precepted:

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	<b>Taxbase Total</b>	<b>Total Precept £</b>
Cheltenham	43,650.00	66,512,991
Cotswold	42,374.24	64,569,014
Forest of Dean	30,636.26	46,682,916
Gloucester City	39,072.60	59,538,041
Stroud	46,505.95	70,864,831
Tewkesbury	36,781.36	56,046,696
<b>Total</b>	<b>239,020.41</b>	<b>364,214,489</b>

- b) That approval is given to the Capital programme set out in Annex 8a of the detailed MTFS, and delegated authority is given to the Section 151 Officer to vary allocations between individual schemes in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Change.
2. That the Council approves the Capital Strategy, set out in Annex 7 of the detailed MTFS, the Treasury Management Strategy and the non-treasury Investment Strategy for 2022/23, set out in Annex 10 of the detailed MTFS.
3. That approval is given to the Operational Boundary and Authorised Limits of borrowing, as set out in the Capital Strategy, at Annex 7 in the detailed MTFS as follows:

<b>Authorised limit and operational boundary</b>	<b>2021/22 Limit £m</b>	<b>2022/23 Limit £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Limit £m</b>	<b>2024/25 Limit £m</b>	<b>2025/26 Limit £m</b>
<b>Total Authorised Limit for Debt and Other Liabilities</b>	<b>510.000</b>	<b>540.000</b>	<b>565.000</b>	<b>585.000</b>	<b>580.000</b>
Split: Debt	356.960	391.173	413.425	437.758	437.177
Other Liabilities	153.040	148.827	151.575	147.242	142.823
<b>Total Operational Boundary for Debt</b>	<b>490.000</b>	<b>520.000</b>	<b>545.000</b>	<b>565.000</b>	<b>560.000</b>
Split: Debt	336.960	371.173	393.425	417.758	417.177
Other Liabilities	153.040	148.827	151.575	147.242	142.823

- a) Noting that the authorised limit for 2023/24 will be the statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.
- b) That the approval is given to the Prudential Indicators for Treasury Management set out in Annex 10 of the detailed MTFS for:
- i. the maturity structure of borrowings,  
and
  - ii. the upper limit for principal sums invested beyond year end of £200 million.
4. That the Council approves the Schools Funding set out in section I and Annex 9 in the detailed MTFS.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

5. That the following amendments to the draft budget be approved:

<b>Political Group</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>2023/24 Cost £000s</b>	<b>Revenue or Capital</b>
Green	E Bike Hire Scheme	150	Revenue
Green	Secure Bike storage solution	90	Revenue
Green	Support for Rivers Task Group	100	Revenue
Green/Labour	Rights of way	100	Revenue
Lib Dem	Behavioural research and pilot interventions around alcohol consumption	75	Revenue
Lib Dem	Doubling the PROW budget	25	Revenue
Lib Dem	Children's Services - spend to save review of the recommendations of the MacAlister report "the independent review of children's social care"	75	Revenue
Lib Dem	Road safety - bring forward capital spend	400	Capital
Lib Dem	Footway resurfacing	100	Capital
Lib Dem/Labour	Grit bin fund	80	Revenue
Labour	Reducing cost of disabled parking permits	43	Revenue
Labour	Grant funding to develop community transport providers	70	Revenue
Labour	Youth work	159	Revenue

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Labour	Severe weather planning and community preparations	65	Revenue
Conservatives	Additional resources for TRO resolutions	150	Revenue

### 123. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Fifty-seven member questions had been received. The following supplementary questions were asked:

Question 1 – Cllr Andrew Gravells asked whether the Cabinet member would agree to ensure the news that fees would be waived for road closure requests for the King's coronation would be circulated widely.

Cllr Dom Morris confirmed that this would be well advertised across Council channels.

Question 2 – Cllr Andrew Gravells questioned whether the £120 or £80 payment (if made within 29 days) from fixed penalty notices was sufficient to deter permit conditions being broken by utility companies and developers. He asked whether the cabinet member agreed that an increase in fines would force those companies to abide by the permit conditions.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that this issue would be a focus of the Transformation Board and would be discussed with national colleagues.

Question 3 – Cllr Andrew Gravells asked whether the cabinet member would do all he could to ensure that companies and utilities worked together properly to avoid unnecessary traffic problems.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that he understood the frustrations that were being experienced across the network and that he was working to improve those situations.

Question 9 – Cllr Wendy Thomas asked for more clarity over the process of deciding which bus routes were chosen to be subsidised.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that subsidy funding was used for bus routes that were commercially unviable but there was no specific criteria. The decision to subsidise a route typically reflected usage, accessibility, alternative service provision and the prospective value of the subsidised route. Cllr Robinson agreed to look into this further and provide a full written answer.

Question 10 – Cllr Wendy Thomas noted that The Robin Community Transport Service had lower usage in the north Cotswolds region compared to the Forest of Dean and asked whether the unused vehicle in the Cotswolds could be re-allocated to where there was higher need.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that take up had been slower in the Cotswolds but that it was expected that it would increase going into the spring. He was inclined to wait until the summer to make a decision.

Question 11 – Cllr Chloe Turner asked whether there was more the Council could be doing to convince Stagecoach away from service cuts and whether local members could be given more notice when cuts were expected to help communities prepare to engage with Stagecoach.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the Council had been successful in persuading Stagecoach to avoid some cuts and that discussions were happening on a near daily basis. The Cabinet member also explained that there was a period of time between Stagecoach initially raising plans to make cuts and those plans being publicised. During this time, the County Council would stage discussions with Stagecoach to try and avoid the proposed cuts becoming a reality, and sometimes this was successful. There was therefore a balance to strike about making public ideas from Stagecoach that had not yet been finalised.

Question 16 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton noted the vacancy rate for social care workers in Gloucestershire and asked whether offering £2 per hour above the national minimum wage would help with care staff retention and recruitment.

Cllr Kathy Williams explained that she was not in a position to set salary but that a recruitment day had been held recently and interest in social care roles had been promising.

Question 17 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton asked about the plans for future use of Bohanam House.

Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin explained that Bohanam House had been a significant closure and that work was underway to decide what to do with the building and the grounds going forward.

Question 18 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton expressed his pleasure that there were plans to maintain fire cover across the County in the case of a firefighter's strike but asked how confident the Cabinet member was in his plan for retained cover.

Cllr Dave Norman MBE explained that the protection of Gloucestershire residents was a top priority and that he was confident in the Chief Fire Officer and the Principal Fire Officers and their plan to maintain cover in the case of industrial action. An offer had been made of a 7% pay rise, and 5% for the next financial year and the Cabinet member was hopeful it would be accepted.

Question 22 – Cllr John Bloxsom asked if all members could be sent a list of subsidised bus routes including journeys on partially subsidised routes.

Cllr Philip Robinson said that he would see if that would be possible and get back to members.

Question 24 – Cllr Steve Robinson noted that after April 1<sup>st</sup> there would be no more hot meals delivered to elderly and disabled residents in Gloucestershire. It was asked whether there was any way to continue provision.

Cllr Kathy Williams explained that discussions were ongoing and that there was a service provider in the Forest of Dean that may be able to take over some of the service contract. It was also explained that a reassessment of those who qualified for hot meals was being carried out.

Question 25 – Cllr Steve Robinson asked whether the £3.50 meal subsidy was sufficient and if the service provider would have accepted the contract if more had been offered.

Cllr Kathy Williams explained that it was uncertain why the service provider had turned down the contract. It was explained that the company received the full price of the meal and that that price was subsidised for residents by the Council.

Question 26 – Cllr Gill Moseley noted that commercial waste was not accepted by Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) and asked why it was believed that most tyres delivered to HRCs were from commercial sources. The member asked whether the traceable details that visitors were required to give were followed up. It was suggested that if these tyres were now fly tipped instead, the taxpayer would still be paying for their disposal.

Cllr David Gray explained that the hope was that this change would ensure commercial used tyres would be disposed of commercially rather than through Council funded HRCs. More Districts were pursuing fly-tipping more aggressively and lowering the number of tyres that the Council had to dispose of would improve efficiency and save money. The Cabinet member also offered to give a written response that gave information on traceable details follow up.

Question 27 - Colin Hay expressed that it would be useful for the whole Council to receive a seminar that explained progress on the long-term future planning for Vision 2050.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE said that he would be happy to facilitate such a seminar for members at some stage over the next 6 months.

Question 28 – Cllr Ben Evans expressed concern over the design and maintenance of the Cheltenham to Gloucester cycleway. The member asked whether the planning and delivery of the cycle path was being completed before consideration had been made for the route's maintenance.

Cllr David Gray explained that the designs had used universal standards that were well established. The adverse weather plan would be evaluated to ensure that the cycle path was covered and usable.

Question 29 – Cllr Ben Evans asked whether it would be possible to publicise the scheduled maintenance work for the cycleway.

Cllr David Gray agreed with the member that it was important the cycleway was maintained so that it could be used and would see what could be done with regards to schedule publication.

Question 34 – Cllr Joe Harris expressed his concern over the lack of progress with regards to Cricklade Street having been pedestrianised in the day but still being used by vehicles. He also asked whether the Cabinet member could rule out the introduction of any new on-street pay and display areas in the centre of Cirencester as part of the TRO.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that there was no consensus about the best way to navigate the situation. Officers were exploring the best options to keep the market centre open whilst satisfying different interests.

Question 35 – Cllr Joe Harris asked whether the Cabinet member would freeze an increase in parking charges.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that parking charges would rise with inflation.

Question 36 – Cllr Paul Baker asked when pavement improvements in The Strand and other areas in Cheltenham would happen.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that officers had been working with Cheltenham Borough Council and the Cheltenham Civic Society to bring forward those plans but there were no concrete timelines as yet.

Question 38 – Cllr David Brown expressed health and wellbeing concerns around loose fitting utility covers and asked if there was a service level agreement that highlighted the fact that damaged utility covers in residential areas needed to be addressed with higher priority.

Cllr Dom Morris confirmed he would look into this and provide a written response.

Question 43 – Cllr David Brown noted an example recently where temporary lighting had been in place longer than necessary because the utility company had not communicated with Gloucestershire Highways. He asked if the member could explore these communication issues to avoid this happening in the future.

Cllr Dom Morris wanted to reassure members that he was aware of the scale of utilities work across the network and that several utility companies were on performance improvement contracts. The member explained that enforcement of service level agreements would be one of the Transformation Board themes.

Question 46 – Cllr Roger Whyborn noted that of 402 people killed and seriously injured last year in road accidents, over 150 were on 30mph roads. He asked if the member agreed the County would not achieve its road accident targets unless it adopted 20mph roads.

Cllr Dave Norman MBE disagreed explaining that a blanket 20mph scheme would not be enforced across the County, particularly because surveyed members of the public were not in favour. There were several ways planned to reduced road accidents and reducing speed limits where appropriate was just one way.

## **124. SCRUTINY**

In the absence of the Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cllr John Bloxsom, as Vice Chair of the Committee, introduced the Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-22.

The report provided a record of the scrutiny work undertaken in 2020-22 by non-executive members of the County Council. Documenting the work carried out by the council's various scrutiny committees and by independent scrutiny task groups established to add value to the decision-making process at the Council, the report included examples of collaborative work with partners.

Also included within the report, were examples of scrutiny members considering issues and feeding into the decision-making process prior to cabinet decisions being made.

Cllr Colin Hay, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, requested that the various Scrutiny Committee Chairs considered the commissioning intentions set out in the budget when setting committee work plans. Cllr Hay emphasised the value of taking budget considerations into account when monitoring the performance of the Committee's service areas. Cllr Hay also stressed the importance of cabinet members attending scrutiny committee meetings to expand on commissioning intentions and to respond to questions. The requests were noted.

Acknowledging the request to create more links between the work of the scrutiny committees and budget management, Cllr Bloxsom stressed the need for more matrix analysis from which to inform the process. Leader of the Council, Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, accepted the logic of this request but stated there was a lot more work involved between the setting of the budget and eventual outcomes. He agreed, however, that it was a legitimate request for scrutiny members to be better informed on budget analysis and barriers to improvement.

One member raised that the LGA recommended that up to 70% of scrutiny activity should be pre-scrutiny and noting the small number of examples in this report, felt scrutiny needed to do more in this area.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE acknowledged the logic of promoting advance scrutiny to inform cabinet decision making and made a suggestion that initial briefings on large policy decisions be supplemented with more detailed reports for scrutiny committees to consider in advance of cabinet decisions.

The Gloucestershire Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-22 and the scrutiny update report were noted.

## **125. CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, Chair of the Constitution Committee, introduced the item and referred to the recommendations made at the Constitution Committee meeting on 16 January 2023.

Cllr Hawthorne welcomed Richard Blamey, Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel, (IRP), to the meeting to present the Panel's report and recommendations relating to member allowances for the 2023-24 financial year.

Independent of the Council, the IRP was made up of members drawn from the local community. The role of the Panel was to make recommendations on the levels of allowances paid to councillors, based on a fair and open-minded analysis of information.

Mr Blamey outlined the approach taken by the IRP to make the recommendations for the 2023/24 financial year, including discussions at 13 in-person interviews with elected councillors. Data from the interviews and comparisons with other local authorities following a review of allowance schemes for all county councils in England, resulted in the following findings:

- 1) Basic allowances, together with Special Responsibility Allowances, (SRA's), had increased substantially in recent years, with the average basic allowance standing at more than £11,600. It was reported that, member allowances at Gloucestershire County Council were currently well below the average allowances received at other councils.
- 2) The staff pay settlement for 2022-23, agreed in November 2022, (effective 1 April 2022), had been a flat rate increase of £1,925, equivalent to an approximate increase of 6%. The IRP felt it was appropriate to apply a similar percentage increase to all allowances, with effect from April 2023.

Members noted the report and, based on a majority vote,

***RESOLVED*** to approve the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for the 2023-24 financial year.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, thanked Mr Blamey and the members of the IRP for their work.

Members noted the other recommendations proposed in the report and on being put to the vote it was

***RESOLVED*** that the recommendations as set out in the Constitution Committee report be approved.

## **126. LIBRARY STRATEGY 2023-2028**

Cllr Dave Norman MBE, Cabinet Member for Fire, Community Safety and Libraries, presented the Draft Gloucestershire Libraries Strategy 2023-2028.

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

Cllr Norman explained that, under the provisions of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, (PLMA), the County Council, as a library authority, had a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons within the county wishing to make use of it. It was agreed that the current library strategy, adopted in April 2012, no longer represented the future vision and ambition for libraries within Gloucestershire. Outlining the direction and ambitions for the Gloucestershire Library Service, the Strategy will be refreshed and updated annually.

Approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 20th November 2022, the Strategy and background documents to the cabinet decision can be viewed on the County Council website [here](#). Once adopted, the Gloucestershire Library Strategy (2023-2028) will be published on the County Council's library website.

Members spoke in support of the new Strategy and welcomed the technical advances and contributions it offered to the residents of Gloucestershire, and to education.

One member enquired about the plans for the existing Library at the Brunswick Road location and was advised that, as yet no firm decisions had been made on the future of the building. Subject to further discussions, Cllr Norman informed members he would present a report to council when the intentions were known.

Another member, whilst supportive of the Strategy, expressed concern about local library provision and sought assurances that the vision and proposals set out by the document would be aligned with community libraries. Cllr Norman noted the concerns and agreed to pass on the comments to Head of Libraries and Registration, to incorporate into the annual review of the Strategy.

A Stroud member referred to the parking issues that had emerged following the relocation of the Stroud Library, in particular, to disabled parking provision, and urged Cllr Norman to consider such issues when planning the relocation of the Gloucester City Library. Cllr Norman noted the observations and agreed it was important to take into account accessibility considerations.

Commending the facilities offered by the Cirencester Library, a member expressed concern about a potential lack of awareness on the services offered by local libraries, particularly those in remote and obscure locations. In expressing the concerns, the member stressed the need to raise the profile of local libraries and suggested that the County Council's Communications Team promote library services and facilities more widely.

With unanimous support, members noted the report, and

***RESOLVED to adopt the Library Strategy 2023-2028, as part of the Council's Policy Framework, with implementation from 1 April 2023.***

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

**CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 14:42.

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