



## MINUTES OF COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

**DATE: Wednesday 13 September 2023 TIME: 10.00 am**

**VENUE: Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester**

### Present

#### Membership:

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

Apologies: Cllr Rebecca Halifax, Cllr Paul McLain and Cllr Kathy Williams

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

## 4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 4.1 Tour of Britain

The Chair reflected on his experience watching the Tour of Britain stage seven route come to Gloucestershire on 9 September 2023. He shared what a fantastic

event it was and welcomed the very large turnout. He urged members to watch the highlights footage as he felt it showed the very best of the county.

#### **4.2 Steve Mawson**

As members were aware, Steve Mawson was due to leave the Council to take up the role of Chief Executive at Kirklees Council. This was his last council meeting, and the Chair took this opportunity to thank him on behalf of all members for the commitment and dedication he had shown since being appointed as our Deputy Chief Executive back in 2019.

Steve's vast knowledge and experience had greatly benefitted GCC during his time with us. As well as keeping the Council's finances in good order, he played a significant role in chairing the partnership board that oversaw our recovery from COVID, introducing Agile working across GCC and in overseeing the redevelopment of this Council Chamber.

The Chair wished Steve well for the future on behalf of all members.

#### **4.3 Keith Rippington**

Members were invited to pay tribute to former County Councillor Keith Rippington who sadly passed away on the 3 September 2023. Keith served on the Council from 2017-2021 and sat on Audit and Governance Committee, Environment Committee and Planning Committee. The Chair shared that he knew Keith and he was a lovely man. The Chair offered his condolences to Keith's family.

The following Councillors paid their respects:

**Cllr Stephen Davies:** Keith was elected to Council at the same time as me and like me represented a Stroud division. We worked closely together, and he was a friend. He was also a very competent councillor and was actually recently still talked about during the district by-election in Painswick with great affection. He was also a man of very strong convictions, particularly on Brexit which did alter the course of his political career and I feel isolated him from some of his colleagues, although I know he was a strong supporter of Siobhan Ballie MP and that they remained in contact, it was actually Siobhan who told me the sad news. But sadly, not long after his election, he had a number of health issues which set him back and he was not able to continue as actively as he would have hoped. I think in some ways if that hadn't happened, he would have had a career in local politics that would have been very different. Personally, I will always remember bumping into him in the Falcon Inn one Sunday surrounded by his family in happier times, I will remember him in that way.

**Cllr Steve Robinson:** Like Stephen, both Keith and I were elected at the same time, and I can remember Keith very fondly, he was a lovely guy and he always had time to chat. We were both on Planning and in the minibus when we were going around, we would always have a good chat. I remember one time having a drink with him in Nailsworth and we chatted all evening. My thoughts are with his daughters at this time.

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**Cllr Paul Hodgkinson:** I was leader of the Lib Dem Group when Keith actually joined us back in 2019 and as has been said, Brexit was something that Keith felt very strongly about and was one of the reasons he decided to join us. He was with us for a short period of time. Keith was on a political journey, from the Conservatives to the Lib Dems and then in his final months on this council he was an Independent. He really was a nice man; he had a lot of strong convictions, and we greeted him well into our Group but obviously he decided that he wanted to become an Independent after that. However, the most important thing to say is he is a great loss and at a relatively young age that is very sad for his family and all his friends that he had, so we obviously mourn him too on this side of the chamber.

**Cllr Cate Cody:** None of us actually knew Keith but on behalf of the Green Group I would like to extend our commiserations to his family.

**Cllr Susan Williams:** I knew Keith only briefly as I got to know him as the prospective candidate for the Painswick division which I have taken over from him. Every time I met him, I was struck with his sincerity and how determined he was to make a difference in his community and for our county. I have been in contact with the family and would like to also offer my condolences here now. A lovely, lovely gentleman.

Members stood for a 1-minute silence as a mark of respect for Keith.

#### **4.4 Cllr Stephan Fifield**

On behalf of members, the Chair congratulated Cllr Fifield on his recent engagement.

### **5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

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

Question 5 – Mary Leonard stressed concerns that members of rural communities had around road safety and asked that the Cabinet Member reconsider highways policies, viewing rural areas differently to urban areas.

Cllr Dave Norman responded that GCC dealt with road safety for the whole of the county, not just urban or high collision areas. He offered to discuss these concerns in further detail with the member of public.

Question 6 – Mary Leonard asked whether the Council would support a request for the Traffic Commissioner to re-evaluate the Applegates school bus service.

Cllr Philip Robinson said that he would be happy to write to the Traffic Commissioner now that a review had been complete on the route. He did stress that his understanding was that it was inconsiderate parking that was the primary cause of problems and that solutions to that were being worked on.

Question 14 – Sharon Phelps raised concern around the wellbeing of pupils and staff at the Heart of the Forest School and asked for a meeting with the Cabinet Member.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that when a community special school received a delegated budget, all employment powers were conferred on the governing body. That was the legislative landscape of the way different schools were governed. He agreed to meet with Ms Phelps and the Director of Education but stressed that the Council's response would not change from that given to this question.

Question 16 – Sharon Phelps asked what responsibility the County Council had to staff at local authority schools in cases where there was evidence of bullying and intimidation of staff and the governors were not fulfilling their responsibilities of all staff.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the County Council's duty of care had to operate within the defined areas of the Council's legislative responsibilities. He stressed that those responsibilities had been fulfilled.

Question 18 – Katya Laug asked the Cabinet Member where he would advise staff members turn when they and trade unions had voiced concerns about the governing body's ability to deal with complaints.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that those concerns had to be addressed to the governing body. He also highlighted that in May 2023, the Heart of the Forest Special School had an Ofsted inspection in which inspectors found the governing body were fulfilling their responsibilities to staff and students.

Question 19 – Michael Bloxham raised concerns around Cheltenham Zone 15 parking surveys and whether or not they were fit for purpose. He questioned claims that one of the surveys had been carried out post lockdown.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that he was content with the methodology used to inform the decisions behind the scheme. The team at GCC had done an extensive amount of work on initial analysis, producing a plan and putting in place mitigations.

Question 20 – Stella Hobleby asked what concerns had initiated the need for the Zone 15 parking scheme and asked whether those concerns could have been handled more locally.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that it was important to address the parking in the area as a whole rather than targeting pocketed areas which would cause more problems in the future.

Question 21 – Howard Eason asked whether Gloucestershire County Council had a duty of care for staff within schools.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the current legislation did not permit GCC to intervene in the ways Mr Eason had described in his question and that they had to act within the proper frameworks and statutory guidance.

Question 26 – Ian Weaving explained that Alex Chalk MP had, in discussions with him, mentioned a review of the parking scheme within the next 12 months and asked about this missing review.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that a survey would be carried out once the scheme had been implemented and that public consultation had already been extensive. He also explained the local MP had been kept fully informed.

Question 27 – Adrian Oldman asked when he would be able to meet with the Cabinet Member and asked if there would be no more Department for Education funding for rural home to school transport.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that they had been trying to convene a meeting but it was taking time because of diary clashes. He also explained that BSIP+ funding would provide significant amounts of money over the next two years which would have a big impact on public transport.

Question 28 – Adrian Oldman asked when the CIL (community infrastructure levy) bid had been made for Merrywalks bus station development and were improvements dependent on that bid.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the bid had been made the previous week, that around £114,000 had been bid for, and that improvements such as adding seating had been ongoing before the bid was made.

Question 30 – Adrian Oldman asked whether the Cabinet member would agree that it was not sensible to have no plan for solar panels on GCC buildings.

Cllr Lynden Stowe explained that they were looking at pilot projects and were looking to capitalise on recent changes in affordability and efficiency in solar panel technology. He said that as the business case was getting stronger for investing in solar panels he expected more plans to be produced in the coming months.

Question 31 – Adrian Oldman asked whether the Cabinet Member would consider working with co-operatives that installed solar panels for free.

Cllr Lynden Stowe explained he would prefer solutions over which GCC had full control and was not dependent on third party contracts.

## **6. CORPORATE PARENTING**

- 6.1 Cllr Stephen Davies, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years, gave a summary of the report. He highlighted the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection and the Holiday Activity Fund) as recent successes in Children's Services.

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- 6.2 In response to a question about the completion of corporate parenting training by members, the Cabinet Member offered to come back with specifics.

## **7. PETITIONS**

- 7.1 A petition from Cllr Chloe Turner was presented to Cllr Dave Norman on a '20 is plenty' scheme in Minchinhampton.
- 7.2 A petition from Cllr Linda Cohen on the need for urgent action to protect school children in Kingswood was presented to Cllr Dave Norman.
- 7.3 A petition from Cllr Colin Hay on Zone 15 parking scheme was presented to Cllr Dom Morris.

## **8. MOTIONS**

### **Motion 925: Flooding**

- 8.1 Cllr David Drew proposed, and Cllr Graham Morgan seconded the following motion:

*Council notes its role as the Lead Local Flood Authority and its responsibilities and powers to manage flooding, identify communities at highest risk and install flood alleviation measures to protect those properties in partnership with the district councils.*

*Gloucestershire has been impacted by increasingly frequent flooding in recent years including the torrential downpours experienced on the night of 12 June 2023. We note that the County Highways Adverse Weather Plan states that its action plans have been tested after the events in 2007, 2012, 2014, 2019 and 2020.*

*These events are set to increase as a consequence of climate change. Council resolves to convene an urgent summit of all those agencies responsible for flood prevention and resilience to discuss how adequate plans can be put in place and tested to reduce the ongoing threat of flooding and the responses to it, including the Council's own Adverse Weather Plan and other action plans.*

- 8.2 Cllr Drew referenced this motion as a 'cry for help' which he was sure would manifest itself across the chamber today. He stressed that many areas of the county were now flooding quite regularly, and with climate change likely to ensure these extreme weather events increased in both frequency and intensity, it was very important that members and communities were aware of where responsibility lay during a flood event, and crucially how to access that support when needed. He made reference to the fact that all district authorities had flood reliance plans, but these were not in the public domain and some had no member involvement in their drafting.
- 8.3 It was understood that members of the public were sometimes reluctant to report flooding to their homes due to home insurance and future sale of the property, but it

was therefore very difficult for those responsible to have a full understanding of the county's flood problems and therefore put the right defences in place. Cllr Drew hoped this motion was viewed by members as the right way forward to work together and to better protect the county from future events.

- 8.4 In seconding the motion, Cllr Morgan made reference to the various initiatives/strategies such as the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy that was produced by GCC in June 2013 and the Surface Water Forum in the Forest of Dean, both of which had started out very productively, but had recently slowed in progress. These forums and strategies were vital in bringing together joint working and conversations across all organisations who had different roles to play to address flooding. These roles ranged from keeping waterways clear to the installation of Natural Flood Management schemes. The Member summarised that this motion was a plea for joint working to be brought to the forefront in tackling this issue.
- 8.5 A member raised the need to consider Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes before concrete solutions, and for communities to feel encouraged to be involved and promote NFM where possible. It was suggested that members should also be encouraging their residents to report incidents of flooding for the wider public good and to enable organisations to access the most accurate data. It was highlighted that there was also a need to consider where future housing was built and to not place further pressure on identified flood plains and surrounding communities.
- 8.6 Following on from comments around NFM, a member highlighted the huge opportunities and need to 'think outside of the box' when it came to using nature as a natural mitigation. An example was giving of using rewilding projects to slow the movement of rivers and as a result improve their biodiversity and habitats.
- 8.7 Cllr Dom Morris, Cabinet Member for Flooding, welcomed the constructive conversation on this motion today and the message around how important it was for departments and teams to work and plan together in tackling such issues. He echoed tributes paid to the work that was already ongoing in the county and the incredible hard work of officers and looked forward to being part of the proposed summit.
- 8.8 A member spoke in favour of the motion and referenced the many experiences he had over the years of discussions as a high level resulting in little action. This, in addition to the 10-15 years of cuts by national government, had resulted in vital organisations such as the Environment Agency's funding being cut by over half.
- 8.9 Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Leader of the Council, recognised the huge amount of work and investment by GCC and partners since the 2007 flood event. He also acknowledged that the nature of the challenge faced changed with every single event and that the most powerful tool this county was its community resilience. There were many residents who dedicated a lot of time and energy to being flood wardens, leading community groups, and these were the people who understood what needed to be done in their areas. He supported the motion and its message

around working with partners but asked members not to forget the role communities played in tackling this issue as well.

- 8.10 Members shared examples of where joint working at a community level had made a real difference to its flood resilience. These included using local knowledge to identify drains that regularly blocked, having regular meetings with key partners and agencies to coordinate local programmes, and ensuring regular reporting to keep water routes clear etc.
- 8.11 Cllr David Gray, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning, welcomed the comments about the use of biodiversity as a flood mitigation. He acknowledged that often issues such as flooding focused on risks and expenses, but it was important to also recognise the opportunities and benefits, of which biodiversity gain was definitely one. He welcomed the opportunities that would come for nature in better managing our water.
- 8.12 The proposer of the original motion, summarised by thanking members for the very useful debate on this issue. He reiterated that the threat of flooding was an ongoing issue for many of our residents and one that we needed to ensure we were as prepared for as possible in advance of the next inevitable event.

8.13 On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

*Council notes its role as the Lead Local Flood Authority and its responsibilities and powers to manage flooding, identify communities at highest risk and install flood alleviation measures to protect those properties in partnership with the district councils.*

*Gloucestershire has been impacted by increasingly frequent flooding in recent years including the torrential downpours experienced on the night of 12 June 2023. We note that the County Highways Adverse Weather Plan states that its action plans have been tested after the events in 2007, 2012, 2014, 2019 and 2020.*

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**Motion 926: Hunting with dogs on Council land**

- 8.14 Cllr Wendy Thomas proposed, and Cllr Steve Robinson seconded the following motion:

*Council is alarmed at the evidence that hundreds of foxes up and down the country, and here in Gloucestershire, are being illegally killed as a result of hunting with dogs.*



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

*We welcome the Council decision of 27 October 1993 to prohibit access to any Council land or property over which it has legal control by persons and/or organisations engaged in using hounds for the purpose of hunting animals.*

*We further welcome that, subsequently, fox hunting, deer hunting and hare hunting with dogs has been made illegal under the terms of the Hunting Act 2004, except where an exemption applies.*

*We are, however, alarmed that Gloucestershire has recently been identified as the top county in England and Wales for suspected illegal hunting with reports that illegal hunting with dogs by organised hunts is common, while there are few prosecutions.*

*We note that most registered hunts claim to be 'trail' hunting, which has proven to be a loophole in the Hunting Act 2002, growing after the ban, which has allowed hunts to claim that any chase of a wild animal is an accident rather than intentional.*

*We note that there have been distressing local incidents reported in the media which have caused widespread public concern. We are ashamed that Gloucestershire has been identified nationally as having the largest number of suspected illegal hunts and incidents of 'hunt havoc' in the recent hunting season.*

*Council therefore resolves to:*

- 1) Prohibit trail hunting, exempt hunting, hound exercise and hunt meets on land that is owned and controlled by Gloucestershire County Council.*
  - 2) Introduce a clause into any new farm tenancy that trail hunting, exempt hunting, hound exercise and hunt meets will not take place on land rented from Gloucestershire County Council.*
  - 3) Seek a voluntary agreement with existing tenants that trail hunting, exempt hunting, hound exercise and hunt meets will not take place on land rented from Gloucestershire County Council.*
  - 4) Support calls for the Hunting Act 2004 to be strengthened.*
- 8.15 In proposing the motion, Cllr Thomas stated that the hunting of wild animals with dogs had been illegal since the introduction of the Hunting Act in 2004 but whilst the support for the Act remained strong, the overall enforcement of it was seen as weak and its loopholes well known. Between November 2022 and April this year, there were 361 incidents of illegal hunting. Another growing issue was known as 'hunt havoc' which was described as hunts that were trespassing on private land, causing issues on roads, chasing livestock and people's pets, damaging badger sets and intimidating people.
- 8.16 The member noted that across England and Wales, Gloucestershire had been identified as having the largest number of illegal hunts and hunt havoc incidents. The League Against Cruel Sports had recorded 90 incidents in the county over the last season, and this had been referred to as a rural crime wave. It was suggested that GCC could take a small step in turning the tide on this issue by opposing not only illegal hunting, but also the use of GCC owned land for such activities. Acknowledging there would need to be further work and understanding to correctly

implement this, the motion called on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish a working group to consider and make recommendations to council on any actions that could be taken.

- 8.17 Cllr Robinson seconded the motion by stating he felt strongly that there should not be any kind of trail hunting or other loophole activities on county land. He referenced the fact that the Cotswold Hunt was suspended in March this year following allegations of illegality. He asked members to please support this motion and ask scrutiny to consider this issue further.
- 8.18 Members spoke in favour of the motion. A member shared his gratitude that hunting was a thing of the past and supported anything that could be done by councillors to result in a better implementation of the existing law. Another member referenced the requirement on all human beings to protect, rather than destroy, our planet and all that lived within it, particularly in the current climate emergency. They were disappointed however that the motion resolution was for a future working group, rather than immediate action being taken today.
- 8.19 Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Leader of the Council, acknowledged that hunting was a very emotive subject, but the crux of this motion was not about hunting, but rather about whether members had the right to impose their will on GCC farm tenants. He felt very strongly that tenants on our farms should be treated no differently to residents who resided in council housing, and not be used as a political football or imposed upon by members on how they should live their lives. Cllr Hawthorne stated that he fundamentally disagreed with a motion that was seeking to do this.
- 8.20 The Leader therefore proposed that, under Procedural Standing Order 10.6.2 of the Council's Constitution, the motion be referred to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration. This was seconded by Cllr Lynden Stowe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance and Change.
- 8.21 Whilst acknowledging that the original motion resolved for this debate to be continued at scrutiny, Cllr Hawthorne did not believe it appropriate to impose the wording of the motion on members of scrutiny, but rather allow a full and thorough debate, led by scrutiny, on all of the issue at hand.
- 8.22 The Monitoring Officer clarified that Procedural Standing Order 10.6.2 did not carry any automatic right for the debate to return to Council after its consideration by scrutiny.

8.23 On being put to the vote, Council

**RESOLVED** that:

*Motion 926 is referred to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*

### **Motion 927: Fostering motion**

- 8.24 Cllr Stephen Davies proposed, and Cllr Andrew Miller seconded the following motion:

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*Council notes:*

- *There are over 800 children in the care of Gloucestershire County Council.*
- *We have approximately 250 in house foster carers, but we need many more to meet growing demand.*
- *Nationally and locally, recruiting and retaining sufficient foster carers is an enormous challenge.*
- *That all elected members, as corporate parents, have a responsibility to help us recruit new foster carers so that we can create a resilient, diverse and caring foster parent network that can meet the needs of all children in our care.*

*Whilst Council accepts that the responsibility for recruiting and retaining Foster Carers sits with Officers within the Council, that Councillors (as corporate parents) can assist by:*

- *Sharing information on foster carer recruitment across all of our networks so that we can ensure the message gets out countywide across variety of platforms. This can include:*
  - *Sharing information about foster recruitment on social media*
  - *Adding a link to <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fostering/> onto email signatures*
  - *Adding a section on foster recruitment to our local newsletters/ updates if this is appropriate, and not attached to any party political messaging*
  - *Sharing information on foster recruitment with parish and town councils, local schools and religious venues so that these groups can also help to disseminate information. Writing to our district councillor colleagues and members of parliament to ask them to share this information on their social media too to ensure that the message gets out as wide as possible*

[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/UKGLOUCESTERSHIRE/2022/10/14/file\\_attachments/2298602/GCC\\_2786%20Fostering%20Generic%20A4%20Poster\\_AW.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/UKGLOUCESTERSHIRE/2022/10/14/file_attachments/2298602/GCC_2786%20Fostering%20Generic%20A4%20Poster_AW.pdf)

- 8.25 The proposer, Cllr Stephen Davies, stated that this was an important motion for a number of reasons. Fostering provided the best outcome for a child or young person after being removed from their birth parents. The huge benefits of them being cared for in a family home environment as opposed to an institution were obvious. It was also the most cost-efficient way of looking after a child or young person and in a service where cost was always a challenge, its importance was clear. At a recent Corporate Parenting workshop, the member witnessed a young girl describing her foster parent as 'the best in the world'. There was no doubt she was happy and felt loved and safe.
- 8.26 The Council was always competing with private providers in this area, but the Member highlighted that resident interest in fostering, if done so through the Council, would be supported by the full Children's Services offering. A recent development of the Service was grouping up new and experienced foster carers to share mutual support and advice. Members were encouraged to use this motion as

a platform to talk about fostering more openly in their local updates or in discussions with town and parish councils. It was not asking members to take sole responsibility for promoting fostering but asking for their help.

- 8.29 In seconding the motion, Cllr Andrew Miller shared his personal experience of becoming a new foster parent and the process which led to his and his wife's approval. They had now been approved for short breaks, respite, and short-term placements and shared that whether or not you had been a parent yourself, being a foster carer would completely open your eyes to a new world and challenge you in ways you would never expect. There were of course highs and lows of the experience but one thing you could be sure of was you were making a difference to the child or young person's life. He summarised that even though they were very early on their journey, their lives had been enriched and they would have no hesitation in recommending it to others.
- 8.30 Members paid a massive thank you to all foster carers in the county for the very considerable and amazing work they did, recognising that it was difficult to give more than opening up your whole life to child or young people in need and for that the county owed carers a debt of gratitude. They fully supported this motion and found one of its real benefits was that fostering was now being discussed in new forums, such as at parish council meetings. It was important for members to keep up this momentum, to keep pushing the message and encourage more brilliant people into this vocation.
- 8.31 A member shared their experience of being a foster child and finding being with a foster carer a valuable and life enhancing personal experience. They recognised the positive role of carers and how their impeccable generosity to open their homes to strangers could not be underestimated.
- 8.32 A member raised that, in order to do the very best as a service and as Corporate Parents, there needed to be a proper action and delivery plan to tackle the challenge around finding caring and stable homes, whilst also in competition with other private agencies. The use of communications was vital in engaging people and to help them understand the difference that can be made by becoming a foster carer through the Council. For members to effectively action these resolutions, communication materials needed to be provided to ensure correct and coherent messages.
- 8.33 In summing up, the proposer of the motion paid tribute to members for always feeling able to share their personal experiences in the chamber and felt proud of the role members could play as Corporate Parents. He recognised comments around improving communications across all of Children's Services and having materials ready for members to share.
- 8.34 On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

*Council notes:*

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- *There are over 800 children in the care of Gloucestershire County Council.*
- *We have approximately 250 in house foster carers, but we need many more to meet growing demand.*
- *Nationally and locally, recruiting and retaining sufficient foster carers is an enormous challenge.*
- *That all elected members, as corporate parents, have a responsibility to help us recruit new foster carers so that we can create a resilient, diverse and caring foster parent network that can meet the needs of all children in our care.*

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- *Sharing information on foster carer recruitment across all of our networks so that we can ensure the message gets out countywide across variety of platforms. This can include:*
  - *Sharing information about foster recruitment on social media*
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  - *Adding a section on foster recruitment to our local newsletters/ updates if this is appropriate, and not attached to any party political messaging*
  - *Sharing information on foster recruitment with parish and town councils, local schools and religious venues so that these groups can also help to disseminate information. Writing to our district councillor colleagues and members of parliament to ask them to share this information on their social media too to ensure that the message gets out as wide as possible*

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### **Motion 928: Refugee motion**

- 8.35 The following motion was proposed by Cllr Stephan Fifield and seconded by Cllr Mark Hawthorne:

*The conflicts and unrest in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan have forced many people to make Gloucestershire their home – often leaving suddenly and without loved ones. Across our county, our communities have welcomed and supported these refugees. Many people including teachers, healthcare professionals, religious groups, charities, and council staff have worked incredibly hard to ensure we are able to provide essential support to those who have come to Gloucestershire after fleeing conflict in their own countries. Currently, there are around 1500 refugees resettled in Gloucestershire under the several government resettlement schemes:*

- *Since 1 April 2022, 1528 Ukrainian guests have arrived in Gloucestershire under the Homes for Ukraine scheme (HFU). These guests have been welcomed into the homes of 793 generous host families. Originally, HFU was designed to last 6- 12 months. However, it has now been extended beyond the originally conceived*

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*timescales due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Currently there are 355 households still hosting Ukrainian guests in Gloucestershire.*

- There are also a further 300 Ukrainians living with other family members in Gloucestershire under the Ukrainian Family Scheme.*
- In April 2021, the government launched the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We have committed to resettling 35 Afghan families under the ARAP/ACRS with 31 families currently resettled in the county. We have welcomed 127 Afghan individuals in County across these two schemes.*

*The Syrian Resettlement Programme was announced by the government in September 2015 and converted to the UK resettlement scheme in April 2021. So far, 93 families (379 people) from Syria and other countries have been supported to resettle in the county under the Gloucestershire Refugee Resettlement Programme (GRRP).*

*We are proud to be such a welcoming county and pay tribute to all the people in our communities who have helped make Gloucestershire home to so many people in their time of greatest need. In particular, council would like to thank:*

- The hosts on the HFU scheme who have opened their family homes to welcome those displaced by war.*
- Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) who provide critical support to refugees and asylum seekers living in Gloucestershire, including casework, education and employment support, coordination of activities and advocacy.*
- Gloucestershire's Strategic Migration Partnership who oversee all of this work and liaise with the Home Office.*
- GCC's Public Health and Communities team who have worked incredibly hard on all these schemes but especially the HFU rapid response team who coordinate all the required checks for hosts and welcome visits for guests.*
- All other groups and individuals who work tirelessly across the county to support and provide comfort to refugees, many of whom are suffering from severe trauma. This includes religious groups, volunteers, and the charity sector.*

*As a thank you to all of these groups and individuals, council calls on cabinet to host a 'thank you' event to demonstrate our gratitude to everyone who has worked to make Gloucestershire a welcoming and hospitable county to those fleeing war, conflict, and persecution.*

*And furthermore*

- Council commits to marking UK Refugee Week annually to reflect on the experiences of refugees worldwide and to acknowledge and thank the many community and voluntary groups across Gloucestershire who have supported those fleeing persecution to find a new home in our county.*

8.36 In proposing the motion, Cllr Stephan Fifield referenced the horrific conflicts that had displaced millions of people across the world and recalled the debate at a previous Council condemning the illegal invasion of the Ukraine. The world was

living in a period of destabilisation and in response, this county's residents had repeatedly come together to make a difference where they could.

- 8.37 There were over 1500 refugees that called Gloucestershire their home, and this was only possible due to the hard work and generosity of many residents, communities, and organisations. This motion was aimed at saying thank you to all those who had made Gloucestershire feel so welcoming and continued to support refugees to build a good life here. It was a small token in comparison but was an important statement from the Council that these efforts, hard work, sacrifice, and generosity were recognised and appreciated.
- 8.38 Cllr Mark Hawthorne seconded the motion, but reserved his right to speak.
- 8.39 An example was shared of the Ukrainian refugee support Hub that had been set up in the Forest of Dean in May 2022, the object of which was to provide a critical support network for refugees arriving in Gloucestershire and their sponsors. 16 months on, the group had expanded to almost 300 members which included refugees, sponsors, supporters, and volunteers. The Hub provided opportunities for social events, practical support which things such as job searching and access to transport and it promoted physical and social wellbeing. Members of the Hub had expressed a strong feeling of belonging in the county and were making their journey from displaced refugees to Gloucestershire residents.
- 8.40 A member shared that the work done by GARAS that was so fundamental to the way refugees and asylum seekers were treated in our community. The organisation had achieved huge growth over a number of years and continued to do everything they could to find the best ways to support people who were in desperate need of its help.
- 8.41 It was raised that whilst they respected the intention of the motion and welcomed its spirit, a member had concern around hosting an event in an area where every penny counted. They hoped that thought would be given to make sure the event was as economic as possible, and that the Council continued to financially support these organisations where possible.
- 8.42 Cllr John Bloxsom moved the following amendment, seconded by Cllr David Drew:

*The conflicts and unrest in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan have forced many people, to make Gloucestershire their home – often leaving suddenly and without loved ones. Across our county, our communities have welcomed and supported these refugees. Many people including teachers, healthcare professionals, religious groups, charities, and council staff have worked incredibly hard to ensure we are able to provide essential support to those who have come to Gloucestershire after fleeing conflict in their own countries. Currently, there are around 1500 refugees resettled in Gloucestershire under the several government resettlement schemes:*

- *Since 1 April 2022, 1528 Ukrainian guests have arrived in Gloucestershire under the Homes for Ukraine scheme (HFU). These guests have been welcomed into the homes of 793 generous host families. Originally, HFU was designed to last 6-12*

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months. However, it has now been extended beyond the originally conceived timescales due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Currently there are 355 households still hosting Ukrainian guests in Gloucestershire.

- There are also a further 300 Ukrainians living with other family members in Gloucestershire under the Ukrainian Family Scheme.
- In April 2021, the government launched the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We have committed to resettling 35 Afghan families under the ARAP/ACRS with 31 families currently resettled in the county. We have welcomed 127 Afghan individuals in County across these two schemes.

The Syrian Resettlement Programme was announced by the government in September 2015 and converted to the UK resettlement scheme in April 2021. So far, 93 families (379 people) from Syria and other countries have been supported to resettle in the county under the Gloucestershire Refugee Resettlement Programme (GRRP).

Council notes that, in addition to the arrival of people through these Government programmes, relating specifically to eligible persons from designated countries mentioned:

- The county has also received asylum seekers and other refugees from Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq and other areas of war, conflict and unrest.
- Some Afghan refugees settled in the county have no means of family reunification, and through lack of legal or safe routes, have family members left at the mercy of agents or smugglers and terrifying journeys and boat crossings.
- There are approximately 1,000 asylum seekers in the county of whom half have been placed in hotels by the Home Office, at short notice, and without local control, and that there are also over 100 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the county.
- The number of people seeking refugee status has grown due to claims not being assessed and that numbers in the county will rise further as a result of multiple occupation of hotel rooms as a result of a recent Home Office directive.
- This is taking place against a background of anti-asylum seeker rhetoric with claims made by those using irregular routes deemed to be inadmissible, and liable to detention and deportation.

We are proud to be such a welcoming county and pay tribute to all the people in our communities who have helped make Gloucestershire home to so many people in their time of greatest need. In particular, council would like to thank:

- The hosts on the HFU scheme who have opened their family homes to welcome those displaced by war.
- Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) who provide critical support to refugees and asylum seekers living in Gloucestershire, including casework, education and employment support, coordination of activities and advocacy.



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

- Gloucestershire's Strategic Migration Partnership who oversee all of this work and liaise with the Home Office.
- GCC's Public Health and Communities team who have worked incredibly hard on all these schemes but especially the HFU rapid response team who coordinate all the required checks for hosts and welcome visits for guests.
- All other groups and individuals who work tirelessly across the county to support and provide comfort to refugees, many of whom are suffering from severe trauma. This includes religious groups, volunteers and the charity sector.

As a thank you to all of these groups and individuals, council calls on cabinet to host a 'thank you' event to demonstrate our gratitude to everyone who has worked to make Gloucestershire a welcoming and hospitable county to those fleeing war, conflict and persecution.

And furthermore

- Council commits to marking UK Refugee Week annually to reflect on the experiences of refugees worldwide and to acknowledge and thank the many community and voluntary groups across Gloucestershire who have supported those fleeing persecution to find a new home in our county.

In addition, further resolves to:

- Recognise and continue ongoing support to asylum seekers and refugees in our midst and to increase our capacity to do so.
- Identify best practice learning from experience of county and district cooperation generated by the settlement schemes relating people from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan.
- Take action, together with our partners, stakeholders, and the voluntary and community sector, for wider outreach and community inclusion for all refugees.
- Call for full Government funding to ensure that those accommodated by the Home Office can access health and other essential services and that any impact on existing local service provision is minimal.

8.43 In proposing the amendment, Cllr Bloxsom welcomed the wording of motion, echoing the importance of acknowledging the role local organisations and communities had played in providing homes for refugees, but felt it was equally as important to acknowledge the wider context and that's what the amendment sought to do.

8.44 The member questioned why all these efforts from volunteers and organisation were necessary and felt there was something not right in a system that was producing such outcomes. Many people who sought asylum in the UK were not eligible for assistance under the programmes cited in the motion, as these only covered particular groups and had eligibility rules. Members needed to acknowledge that there were other areas of conflict, and people who needed assistance that were not covered by the set criteria. He added that there was approximately 1000 people across the county being homed in hotels, a number which was likely to increase due to Home Office policy changes.

- 8.45 He summarised that whilst the efforts of GARAS, residents and other organisations should be celebrated, there was a need to take further action to see where improvements were needed and to address this wider context. He hoped this amendment would be viewed as constructive.
- 8.46 The Chair adjourned the meeting for 15 minutes for members to consider the amendment, following which, the debate continued on the amendment.
- 8.47 Members recognised the spirit of the original motion and wanted to put on record their thanks to everybody who had played their part in welcoming refugees into our county and supporting them to become an integral part of our communities. They did however feel that the amendment painted a more accurate and realistic picture of people fleeing war and prosecution across the world, and adding reference to asylum seekers was a positive step. Examples were highlighted in Gloucestershire where asylum seekers had been here for a number of years, living in a single room with no access to services and were still awaiting their first visit from the Home Office, having already experienced massive trauma. This was the reality for many who arrived in the country and in Gloucestershire and that these were people who could contribute and make a real difference to our society.
- 8.48 As seconder of the original motion, the Leader expressed his disappointment with the amendment, which he referred to as a wrecking amendment as it effectively changed the debate from one about refugees, where the council had a clear responsibility, to one about asylum seekers which was a national responsibility and one which local authorities had no funding to provide for. Cllr Hawthorne wanted to get back to thanking Gloucestershire's unsung heroes and reflected sadly that this had now been a lost opportunity to speak as one voice as a council.
- 8.49 Cllr Bloxsom stressed that this was not a wrecking amendment, it did not delete a single word of the original motion but sought to add reference to the wider context, seek to resolve wider actions and enhance the motion.
- 8.50 In responding to the amendment, as proposer of the original motion, Cllr Fifield expressed his disappointment at the wider debate which had ensued today, not being the purpose of the original motion, which had been very specifically worded to focus on the scope of council and efforts of those within it.
- 8.51 The amendment was put to the vote and was lost. The debate returned to the substantive motion.
- 8.52 The proposer of the original motion summed up by thanking members for their contributions today. He would ensure that the thank you event was the right sort of thank you and ensure as many organisations and charities were invited, he urged members to highlight if they felt any were missed off the original list. He finalised by reiterating that the purpose of this motion was to send a huge thank you to the volunteers, organisations, officers, charities for their continued efforts. Members gave a round of applause.

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8.53 On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

*The conflicts and unrest in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan have forced many people to make Gloucestershire their home – often leaving suddenly and without loved ones. Across our county, our communities have welcomed and supported these refugees. Many people including teachers, healthcare professionals, religious groups, charities, and council staff have worked incredibly hard to ensure we are able to provide essential support to those who have come to Gloucestershire after fleeing conflict in their own countries. Currently, there are around 1500 refugees resettled in Gloucestershire under the several government resettlement schemes:*

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

- *All other groups and individuals who work tirelessly across the county to support and provide comfort to refugees, many of whom are suffering from severe trauma. This includes religious groups, volunteers, and the charity sector.*

*As a thank you to all of these groups and individuals, council calls on cabinet to host a 'thank you' event to demonstrate our gratitude to everyone who has worked to make Gloucestershire a welcoming and hospitable county to those fleeing war, conflict, and persecution.*

*And furthermore*

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## **9. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

Fifty-five Member questions had been submitted prior to the meeting. The following supplementary questions were asked:

Question 1 – Cllr David Drew raised a concern around a fatality on the A46 and asked why he was not allowed to show interested parties the evidence around the TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) that had been launched.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that in his discussions with officers he had insisted that transparency was critical around TROs. He offered to look into this incident in more detail.

Question 4 – Cllr David Drew asked how much money was tied up between the County Council and the Shaw Trust and what impact there would be if the Shaw Trust got into difficulties.

Cllr Lynden Stowe explained that that was always a risk with any supplier and that they would continue to monitor with ongoing due diligence.

Question 5 – Cllr David Drew asked if the Cabinet Member could chase delivering him evidence he had been offered from the Stroud Parking Review.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that he had already nudged officers and Atkins and would nudge them again.

Question 6 – Cllr Andrew Miller asked whether the Cabinet Member was aware of the potential dangerous or illegal implications of the planned changes to St Barnabus Roundabout and asked for a meeting with residents to discuss in more detail.

Cllr David Gray said that the intention was not to do any dangerous or illegal work. He committed to meet with the Member and officers to discuss any concerns around this project.

Question 7 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton asked whether the Cabinet Member thought the permit scheme in his division was working as planned.

Cllr Dom Morris was pleased the Member was happy with progress so far but explained it was important to wait and see how developments progressed.

Question 8 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton estimated that the Kingsholm Parking Review had cost around £176,000 and asked whether the Cabinet Member agreed that that was substantial.

Cllr Dom Morris accepted that the team had set out significant resources for this project.

Question 9 – Cllr Jeremy Hilton raised a concern around resolving snags from the work.

Cllr Dom Morris agreed that it was important to resolve any remaining work quickly.

Question 11 – Cllr Cate Cody asked for an email with estimated dates for remaining Community Speed Watch Vehicle Activate Signs and cameras to be in place and to have electrical connection.

Cllr Dave Norman agree to speak with relevant officers shortly and send that email.

Question 12 – Cllr Cate Cody asked for assurance that the Oldfield footway project would be delivered properly.

Cllr Dom Morris apologised that the work had not been completed and assured the Member that the work would be completed properly.

Question 13 - Cllr Cate Cody asked if it would be possible to explore making the problem area in Tewkesbury referenced in her question a problem traffic area.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that his team were considering that as an option.

Question 15 – Cllr Steve Robinson asked how long they would be waiting for funding for wall and fence repairs that had been planned in his division.

Cllr Dom Morris expressed his frustration around the delays on these works. He said an online tracker tool would begin shortly which would clarify the timeline for works and this should help.

Question 16 – Cllr Steve Robinson asked that the Cabinet Member keep on top of highways inspections to make sure signs are easily visible.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that they were working hard to ensure such things were picked up during inspections and he anticipated new technologies could help with this.

Question 19 – Cllr Paul Hodgkinson expressed disappointment around the Robin usage figures in the Cotswolds in comparison to in the Forest of Dean. He asked whether Northleach could be included in the pilot and what plans were in place to increase usage.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that he had been raising the expansion to Northleach regularly but had originally been told that the transport service already available in Northleach could cause problems with the operator. His understanding was that this should now be resolved. The Cabinet Member offered to revisit whether this expansion could now be implemented. He also explained that not all the money set aside for marketing had been used and an external marketing company was getting prepared to launch a new campaign to raise awareness.

Question 20 – Cllr Paul Hodgkinson asked the Cabinet Member for a statement on how he was intending to achieve a rollout of electric vehicle charging points in more rural villages.

Cllr David Gray shared the Councillor's enthusiasm for charging points in rural areas and suggested this could be possible using town halls and public areas. He also explained that he was encouraging Tewkesbury Borough Council to use money they had for charging points.

Question 22 – Cllr Gill Moseley asked what plans there were to search for sites suitable for installation of rapid charging points.

Cllr David Gray explained that as electric vehicle ownership increased, demand for charging would increase and he was expecting commercial provision of charging points to increase.

Question 23 – Cllr Gill Moseley asked what the additional teams deployed for the 'Summer of resurfacing' were doing before being deployed to that project.

Cllr Dom Morris explained that the transformation programme had delivered significant improvements to roads across the County.

Question 24 – Cllr Gill Moseley asked if the offer in the digital household grant would include satellite broadband such as Starlink.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne offered to come back to the Councillor with an answer.

Question 26 – Cllr Linda Cohen asked that the meeting planned for the 25<sup>th</sup> September would go ahead such that involved parties can discuss the findings of the safety review.

Cllr David Norman MBE said that he was not involved in the discussions around that proposed meeting and the details of the road safety inspection report had been discussed in a Parish Council meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2023. He reminded the Member that there were aspects of this issue that fell under the portfolio of other

Cabinet Members but still expressed a willingness to discuss the report further with regards to road safety.

Question 28 – Cllr Roger Whyborn asked how he could reassure residents that the County were managing large mature trees in Hatherley Road, and asked whether the Council would be taking a more proactive approach to managing trees in advance of them causing damage.

Cllr Dom Morris gave assurance that work was being done to plan for the management of those trees and discussions were ongoing with officers to get all necessary safety work done.

Question 30 – Cllr Bernard Fisher asked how many existing speed cameras in the County were working and how long any not working have been out of action for.

Cllr David Norman MBE explained that existing speed cameras had been discussed at length in the Road Safety Partnership and insisted that new cameras that offered more information were necessary to the future safety of Gloucestershire's road. He offered to come back to the member with the relevant information around existing speed cameras.

Question 31 – Cllr David Willingham asked for assurance that the Audit and Governance Committee would be kept up to date with any slippage for the resolution of high priority recommendations.

Cllr Stephen Davies explained that progress was being made in a timely fashion and suggested that Children's and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee were the more relevant committee for those updates to go to, but agreed to keep the Audit and Governance Committee up to date.

Question 32 – Cllr David Willingham asked the Cabinet Member to explain what interim measures were in place to keep individuals and carers safe.

Cllr Stephan Fifield explained that he had spoken with case officers and that it would take more time to arrive at the right solution. He also explained that interim measures had been put in place and that he was happy to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with an update once ready.

Question 33 – Cllr David Willingham raised concerns from residents in his division around anti-social behaviour on e-bikes. He asked whether the County Council could put more pressure on the Police and Central Government to tackle these issues.

Cllr David Norman MBE explained that the Police would be involved and that if the Member emailed him the details of the concern, he would bring the concerns as an agenda item to the next Road Safety Partnership meeting.

Question 34 – Cllr Paul Baker asked when the further tranche of community speed watch funding would be decided and how much money would be allocated.

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Cllr David Norman MBE explained that he could not give more detail as the budget setting process was only just beginning. He explained that he would be working hard to get sufficient funding.

Question 36 – Cllr Paul Baker asked what further plans were in place to increase school capacity for the 430 children with special educational needs learning in independent provision.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that Sladewood Academy had opened last week offering 60 places for children with learning difficulties. He added that a few weeks ago £16.5 million in funding had been agreed by Cabinet for a new school in Abingdale that would cater to 200 students. He also explained that recent bids for funding for special schools had been unsuccessful so they were looking for opportunities to provide for the remaining 200 students. He also said that existing schools were opening new classrooms that would increase capacity.

Question 37 – Cllr Paul Baker raised concern on the capital backlog on schools and the number of temporary buildings on school sites. He asked for the definition of temporary buildings and what plans were in place for their replacement. He also asked what plans were in place to resolve the backlog.

Cllr Philip Robinson explained that the temporary buildings were deemed fit for occupation and that repairs to get through the backlog would be prioritised based on safety.

Question 40 - Bernard Fisher raised concerns that people such as planning officers were not aware of delays to the M5J10 scheme. He asked whether the Cabinet Member was certain that this delay would not lead to the project being delayed further down the line.

Cllr David Gray expressed his regret around the delay but conceded that such large projects are often delayed. He was hopeful that the importance of the scheme would prevent it from being delayed further.

## **10. SCRUTINY REPORT**

The report was noted.

## **CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 13:50.