

County Council Report for November 2024

Sue Williams

November has been a busy month for the county council. I have included many of the events which may be of interest.

Retirement of Chief Executive of Gloucestershire County Council.

During the full council meeting on the 6th November It was announced that Pete Bungard, Chief Executive will retire in May 2025 . Pete felt that with the county council elections taking place next May, it was a sensible time to hand over the reins to someone new, allowing the new chief executive to build relationships with the new and returning councillors from the start of their term.

Fire Chief Apologises for historic institutional racism and organisational failings

The apology comes as Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service publishes the findings of its Independent Review, led by West Midlands Employers (WME) into allegations of racism and bullying between 1991 and 2018.

The review was commissioned last year by the Chief Fire Officer, Mark Preece, with support from the county council to provide a platform for those not previously listened to, making sure they had the opportunity to share their experiences.

The team from WME spoke to 40 current and former members of staff and analysed over 4,500 documents. The report contains distressing experiences and accounts of upsetting and unacceptable behaviour during the period covered by the report.

The review found that GFRS had been institutionally racist but, that the Service was not institutionally racist today. However, the review did recognise the continuing grapple with the legacy of its past and acknowledges there is still work to do.

The key findings in the report relate to past institutional racism and organisational failings between 1991 to 2018 including poor watch cultures that hindered integration; leadership that prioritised operational competence over people management and inclusivity; a lack of psychological safety in particular when raising concerns with inconsistent and ineffective grievance processes; and widespread historical misogyny.

Many of the report's 14 recommendations are areas previously identified by GFRS as needing improvement, with work already underway to address them. New recommendations from the report will be added to GFRS's ongoing transformation programme to ensure they are actioned as quickly as possible.

“Gloucestershire Recycles” has launched a new campaign aimed at answering all our questions about recycling.

The campaign, called *‘Talking Rubbish’*, has been set up by Gloucestershire Recycles, which is a partnership of Gloucestershire County Council and the six districts councils. It aims to answer questions about recycling and clarify some of the myths and misinformation.

According to figures from December 2023, the amount of household waste in Gloucestershire sent for reuse, recycling and composting was 52.4 per cent – and more than 60 per cent of what is put in the average waste bin in Gloucestershire could have been recycled.

Households are also contaminating their recycling through well-intended ‘wishcycling’. (Wishcycling is putting something in the recycling bin and hoping it will be recycled when it cannot or is unlikely to be recycled.)

Glass is the number one contaminate, with many households mistakenly adding old or broken drinking glasses to their recycling. Contamination creates problems along the recycling process and can ultimately mean that the recycling cannot be made into new materials.

Plastics are a very important topic for lots of people. The campaign is aimed at equipping residents with the knowledge of which plastics can and can’t be recycled easily in Gloucestershire, along with other materials. The campaign will encourage residents to ask questions, with the aim of raising awareness of recycling and increasing recycling rates across the county.

Visit GCC website to find out more.

Gloucestershire residents can submit their questions about recycling online and find out more information about the campaign at <https://www.gloucestershirerecycles.com/talkingrubbish>

They can also use the Waste Wizard to find out what to do with items they aren't sure about, including whether it can be recycled kerbside or where the nearest recycling point is for that item. You can use the Waste Wizard at: <https://gloucestershirerecycles.com/wizard>

Residents can also find where their recycling goes on the ‘end destination’ pages at <https://gloucestershirerecycles.com/enddestinations>

Positive response reported on Stroud’s Merry Walks hub revamp

Gloucestershire County Council invited people to give their views during an engagement process This was held from 5th July to 9th September 2024. Residents could comment on what they would like to see at the hub and were invited to submit additional ideas. They were able to add comments to an interactive map and ideas board.

The project is being funded by the County Council, Stroud District Council and Stroud Town Council and aims to transform the hub into a transport interchange that is user-friendly, accessible and inviting for people to use. The proposed improvements include new, high

quality bus shelters, improved displays showing 'real time passenger information' (RTPI), lighting improvements and a better waiting environment.

The online engagement exercise attracted 1,700 visitors to the survey site and of these, 595 engaged with the content in various ways. In-person engagement sessions were also held at Merrywalks to gather feedback from the public.

The feedback demonstrated strong support for improvements, with the majority of respondents favouring the installation of high-quality bus shelters, enhanced lighting and RTPI. Improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, including secure cycle storage and better signage, were also highlighted as essential for promoting sustainable travel.

Following the engagement it is being proposed to go ahead with the following improvements:

- 8 new bus shelters
- RTPI at the bus shelters, within the shopping centre and Stroud railway station
- Seating
- Lining works
- Secure cycle parking
- Bike repair station
- Signage
- Improved footway lighting

One of the bus shelters will feature a 'living roof' with sedum plants, which will help the environment by attracting bees and insects when they flower, while reducing carbon emissions.

The engagement also showed an interest in public toilets, refreshments and cafes. These are outside of the project's scope. However, this feedback was passed onto Stroud Town Council for its consideration.

The project plans are now being finalised, and a planning application has been submitted to Stroud District Council. The work is due to be completed next year.

A New Partnership to improve Short Breaks for Families

Gloucestershire County Council, Barnwood Trust and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance have announced a new partnership aimed at enhancing inclusive short breaks for families of disabled children and young people. This new partnership is part of Gloucestershire County Council's plans to provide families across the county with more choice of inclusive and engaging short breaks for disabled children and young people. It will complement the council's existing county-wide offer and boost support for families.

The initiative will run until April 2027, and will see the partners working together to co-fund short breaks in Gloucester, the North Cotswolds and Tewkesbury. It also provides a tremendous opportunity to explore innovative ways of offering short breaks, building on the insights gained from children, young people, their families, and local providers.

Barnwood Trust will also extend to April 2027, its funding for six projects which have been delivering inclusive short breaks across the county since 2023. This is through the Short Breaks Fund, as part of the Trust's Short Breaks change programme. Barnwood Trust will invest a further £1.2 million in time-limited grant funding for the county-wide projects.

Gloucestershire County Council will use the outcomes of the learning from this partnership to inform the re-procurement in 2026 of short breaks services across the county.

Public Consultation on County Council Budget

The county council has released details of its proposed spending plans for 2025/26 which will see spending rise by more than £32.7 million on 2024/25 levels, to almost £650 million.

The council's Cabinet is set to approve the proposed budget and a launch a public consultation at its meeting on Wednesday 4th December.

The £649.6 million proposed budget includes significant investment into the council's priority areas of highways, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), adult services, infrastructure, and the environment.

A further £10 million is proposed to be put towards delivering on the council's £100 million four-year commitment to go on improving Gloucestershire roads, with a greater focus in 2025/26 on tackling rural roads.

A total of £12.8 million is set to go towards a new £16.5 million 200 place special school.

Young people with SEND and their families would be supported with an extra £2.1 million.

£7.5 million towards the future construction of three new adult care homes is being set aside, with further investment planned in future years.

The council plans to increase capacity and improve school buildings and facilities of other schools across the county with a £12.4 million investment.

Household Waste Recycling Centres across the county will see improvements with a £1.3 million injection.

The budget proposes raising £16.5 million to help fund services through a council tax increase of 2.99%. The proposals would also see £7.8 million raised specifically to support work with the most vulnerable adults in the county through a further 2% increase in the adult social care precept.

Despite this increase the council still expects to have one of the lowest council tax levels of any county council. Based on a band D property, residents would pay an additional £6.65 each month.

The council continues to challenge itself to work more effectively and as a result has identified £24.5 million in savings, additional income and efficiencies for next year.

A public consultation will run from 5 December 2024 until 5pm on 10 January 2025.

Booking open from Monday 2nd December Free Festive Fun .

Families who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals still have time to register for this winter's Holidays Activities Fun . Thanks to grant funding, the council is also able to extend fun, enriching holiday activities to all children and young people through its Holiday Activities Programme (HAP).

The jam-packed festive activity programme is running during the Christmas school holidays and families are encouraged to check their local district HAF webpage to see what's happening near them. There are lots of great options to choose from including drama and science workshops, sports and games, art and crafts, music and dance, indoor and outdoor activities, as well as the very popular ticketed attractions such as ice skating and pantomimes.

More information about the programme is available at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/haf.

Families who require additional support to choose, book or attend HAF activities, can receive support from our [HAF Community Connectors](#). There is one for each district, as well as a [Specialist SEND Community Connector](#) to improve support for children and young people with additional needs

Families eligible for benefits-related free school meals can also apply for Holiday Free School Meal vouchers, which the council is providing for one week during the school holidays.

Parents will receive £15 per week, for each eligible child from reception to year 11. Applications opened at midday on 25 November and will close at midday on 6 December. Vouchers will be distributed from 16 December. Families can find out more at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/holiday-school-meal-vouchers/

Parents who have registered previously are automatically included and do not need to reapply. Families whose circumstances may have changed, can find out about eligibility for free school meals on our website, and should contact childrensfund@gloucestershire.gov.uk to inform the team of any changes.

Booking opens on Monday 2nd December .

These sessions are incredibly popular and do get booked up very quickly.

Solar panels to give renewable energy to Gloucestershire's Coroners Court.

The 100 kWp solar PV (photovoltaic) system of Aiko 455W panels will provide reliable, clean energy for years to come.

The work was completed in sixteen days by energy specialist contractors GSM Limited in Newent, Gloucestershire, the project will significantly reduce the building's dependency on mains electricity. Around £21,000 of electricity a year will be produced by the solar PV system.

Investing in low carbon technology such as solar panels will help the county council meet its aim to create a carbon neutral county by 2045.

The county council's Building Back Better in Gloucestershire strategy pledges to reduce the county's carbon footprint, as well as reducing emissions by 80 per cent by 2030. At Gloucestershire Coroners Court, the solar PV system's annual carbon emission reduction is equivalent to planting 919 trees.

To deliver the project the county council secured Salix funding from the UK Government, an initiative designed to provide funding to public sector organisations to improve energy efficiency. The primary goal being to reduce carbon emissions and lower energy bills through the implementation of green technologies such as solar panels.

Gloucestershire and Howard County, USA partnership is strengthened by signing a letter of intent

The *Invest in Gloucestershire* team, which is part of Gloucestershire County Council, was delighted to recently host a delegation from Howard County, in the US State of Maryland, culminating in the signing of a Letter of Intent which aspires to foster strong business, enterprise, educational and cultural links between the two counties. Howard County, located between Baltimore and Washington DC, is the US capital of cyber security, in close proximity to America's National Security Agency (NSA) and US Cyber Command. It also has strengths across agri-tech, digital healthcare and advanced engineering.

This mirrors Gloucestershire's economy, being the UK's cyber heartland with the Government's Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and the development Golden Valley, the largest network of high growth agri-tech firms in the UK, a pioneering National Health Service (NHS) Trust and a range of growing engineering businesses.

The delegation from Howard County included local government County Executive, Dr Calvin Ball, the senior management team of their [Economic Development Authority](#), President of [Howard County Community College](#) and CEOs of three cyber companies from [Maryland Innovation Center](#).

The recently opened MX Hub8 Innovation Centre in Cheltenham delivered in a partnership between Cheltenham Borough Council and Hub8 by Plexal, supporting the growth of the local tech community - played host to a series of presentations from strategic partners across Gloucestershire's cyber, IT, health and educational organisations. This included CyNam, those working on the new Golden Valley development, the University of Gloucestershire and a case study from a Gloucestershire company. In addition, there was a session on the opportunities in Howard County and overviews from the three US firms.

The visit also included a tour of the University of Gloucestershire's new FuturePark - their brand new space at Park Campus with a multi-million investment in new facilities for digital related education and research, as well as the Advanced Digital Academy at Gloucestershire College, where the delegation also met some of the cyber degree apprentices.

A key objective of this partnership will include fostering a two-way trade initiative whereby firms across various sectors in Gloucestershire work with Howard County to develop business in the US market, whilst Gloucestershire will work with expanding firms in Howard County that are looking to set up a new UK operation – thereby bringing new job opportunities to Gloucestershire.

Skills and education will be a key component of the partnership. Our academic institutions will explore opportunities for shared learning, new course development and the possibilities for exchange programmes.

There will also be an ongoing series of sector-themed webinars, utilising the expertise in both counties. These will broaden and deepen our respective clusters of excellence through the sharing knowledge, highlighting best practice and uncovering business opportunities. The signing of a Letter of Intent between the two counties, endorsed by Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Howard County Government and Economic Development Authority, acts as a framework to move these initiatives forward.

Lastly may I wish you all season's greetings .

As always, do please contact me if you wish to discuss the contents in greater detail.

07766318854 OR 01452 770928

Sue Williams