

County Councillor's Report

December 24 – Prepared by County Councillor Linda Cohen

Contacts:

I am available on email Linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk or phone 07791110906. I aim to respond within 24 hours. If the matter is urgent, please ring.

My remit covers: highways, public transport, education and skills, children and family services, social care and health, environment, waste recycling.

If you want to alert Gloucestershire County Council to any highway issues, please use www.fixmystreet. This applies to potholes, safety issues, overhanging trees, debris on the highway, broken pavement, drains.

***** Christmas Helplines – at the time of writing this report, details had not yet been issued by Gloucestershire County Council. I will make them available as soon as I have the information. *****

News:

Highways

Resurfacing work/ remedial work:

Rushmire Hill Geotechnical Stabilisation Works

Gloucestershire County Council will shortly be undertaking carriageway stabilisation works on a section of the B4058, also known as Rushmire Hill, which has experienced significant deterioration due to ground movements over recent years.

These works will require a road closure of the top section of Rushmire Hill and Old London Road from 06/01/2025 to 04/07/2025. GCC is already in communication with the directly affected landowners and residents and will be contacting the wider area this week to advise of the works, planned diversion route and advertise the **Public Share/Meet the Contractor Event** being held on the 10th of December at Wotton Baptist Church between the hours of 10:00-19:00 to which it would like to invite you to meet the team. GCC is aware that the closure will cause some disruption and frustration to local road users, residents and businesses and will be contacting those parish councillors affected by the closure and working hard with the main works contractor and local area teams to monitor the known local roads which are likely to be used instead of the diversion route to try to keep the disruption to a minimum.

There is a web page set up for this scheme at [B4508.Rushmire_Hill | Highways \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](http://B4508.Rushmire_Hill_|_Highways_(gloucestershire.gov.uk)) where regular scheme updates are, and will be, posted.

Road safety

We need to establish if there is interest from residents to volunteer to provide road crossing patrols at the British School (Wortley Road), Kingswood (B4060) and North Nibley (B4060).

If you are interested and would like to find out more, please email your Parish or Town Clerk.

Separately I am looking at any traffic calming measures for North Nibley to slow traffic during school travel times.

We are still waiting for news on the TRO for Kingswood for parking restrictions opposite Tubbs Turf.

I am continuing work on a project for the Bradley Street/Dryleaze/ Ellerncroft Road intersection.

Highways will be attending to discuss all the sites during December – dates will be confirmed with the clerk of each Parish of Town Council.

Public Transport

84/85 Bus Service

A petition has been presented to the House of Commons.

A meeting will take place this week between MPs and officers from South Glos, WECA and GCC.

I am also meeting this week to discuss plans for a bus to take residents to Yate for a Christmas Shopping Trip.

Lengthsman Work

All clerks have given a list to Highways or have arranged a date by which they will provide full details of all the tidying and clearing which needs to happen by the end of January in Wotton, the villages and Berkeley Vale. This is particularly pressing on stretches of the A38.

Recycling Centre Thornbury Vs Horlsey

A reminder and last call for signatures:

I am campaigning for residents in Ham and Stone and Berkeley Vale to be able to use the tip at Thornbury (South Glos) rather than the one at Horsley (GCC). This will half journey times and allow residents to use the trip for other purposes, further reducing the impact on the environment. I have set up a petition and we are attracting press interest. I need to demonstrate need and potential use to make my case to both councils for it to be worth their while setting up a collaborative arrangement. Please sign the petition (309 signatures as I write) here -

<https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/use-our-nearest-tip>

Young Carers

I am presenting a joint petition with other councillors at the next full council to ask that all Young Carers are identified and recognised by their school and community and their needs met. More to follow.

Get ready to book free festive fun

Activity booking for the winter Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) opens at midday on Monday 2 December.

Families who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals still have time to register for this winter's HAF. 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.

If they haven't done so already, families are encouraged to:

[Register for the Children's Activities Booking System \(CABS\) now](#) ready to select their choices when booking opens on Monday 2 December.

[Follow their district lead on social media](#) to see what is happening in their area.

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.

Council reveals proposals for 2025/26 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 launch a public consultation at its meeting on Wednesday, 4 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.

It's time to 'talk rubbish' and prioritise recycling with launch of new waste campaign

As Christmas approaches Gloucestershire Recycles has launched a new campaign aimed at answering all your 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. 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.

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>

£1.3m invested in new school building The Eastbrook Centre

[The Altus School](#) is alternative provision for children and young people who have struggled in a mainstream setting and have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded. There are six centres across the county providing education for different age ranges and needs.

Staff at the new Eastbrook Centre, for up to 48 Year 10 and 11 pupils, work with the young people and their families to support them to either complete their education at The Altus School through GCSEs or vocational qualifications, or to return to a mainstream school.

The county council spent around £1.3 million to buy and refurbish the centre, which was previously used as an independent school, to provide improved facilities like a science lab, art room, and specialist food technology and

In September 2023, [the two alternative provision schools in the county were combined into one county-wide school](#), The Altus School, to improve the consistency and quality of the provision, focus on earlier intervention, and improve the facilities in alternative provision.

[Watch a video about The Eastbrook Centre here.](#)

New Gloucester special school gets the go ahead

The new £16.5 million special school for 200 pupils has been granted planning permission.

The school is due to open in September 2026 and will cater for both primary and secondary pupils aged 4 to 16 with moderate and additional learning difficulties (MALD). The school will be built on land that has previously been set aside for educational purposes and is already owned by the county council at Wheatridge East in Abbeydale in Gloucester.

There continues to be an increasing need for special school places in the county. To help address this need, the county council delivered Brook Academy in 2022, a £9.75 million 80-place secondary special school, and spent over £1 million to turn a former mainstream primary school in Stroud into a 60-place primary special school, Sladewood Academy, which opened in 2023.

The school will be run by Reach South Academy Trust, which has extensive experience in supporting children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities across the South West.

[More information and plans for the school can be viewed here.](#)

'Pedal Eazy' by borrowing an e-bike

Residents are being invited to borrow an e-bike for up to three months in a new scheme to promote sustainable travel in Gloucestershire.

The 'Pedal Eazy' project was agreed by the county council following a budget at a meeting earlier this year. The scheme is being run by the council's Thinktravel team with the support of Gloucestershire Bike Project and Transition Stroud, and is open to anyone in the county.

The main aim of the Pedal Eazy Loan Scheme is to give people the chance to borrow an e-bike for up to three months and see how it can transform their travel and daily lives. Anyone aged 18 and over can borrow an e-bike through the scheme. To check availability and make a booking, contact [Transition Stroud](#) or [Gloucestershire Bike Project](#).

E-bikes are hired on a monthly basis, with a maximum hire period of three months. It costs £70 per month for standard rental and £30 per month for jobseekers. If you decide to purchase a bike or accessories, all hire fees are refunded in the form of a bike voucher to encourage continued cycling.

For more information on the project and support with getting going, visit:

<https://www.thinktravel.info/cycling/pedal-eazy/>

Chief Fire Officer apologises for past the fire and rescue service failings between 1991 and 2018, accepts findings and commits to continue transforming GFRS in response to Independent Review

The Chief Fire Officer has apologised on behalf of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) for the past institutional racism that occurred between 1991 and 2018 that its Black and ethnic minority firefighters and staff were subjected to and commends their bravery for speaking up in order to set the record straight.

The apology comes as GFRS 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.

- Ends -