



Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
**Secretary of State for Housing,  
Communities & Local Government**

ask for: Councillor Steve Jordan  
ddi number: 01242 264330  
date: 1 May 2020  
email: [steve.jordan@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:steve.jordan@cheltenham.gov.uk)

Dear Robert,

### **The role of Local Government in supporting post Covid-19 recovery**

Like many Local Authorities throughout the UK, Cheltenham Borough Council is proud to stand together with our key worker colleagues across health, care and front-line services and play our part in shielding the vulnerable, protecting our community and supporting businesses during Covid-19.

With our business continuity and emergency planning efforts well underway, we feel now is the right time to highlight the short, medium and long-term requirements that will enable Cheltenham Borough Council to be able to play a critical role in supporting the local community and economic recovery of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and the wider region.

Firstly, we welcomed Government assurance that Councils would be reimbursed for its Covid-19 expenditure and we should do *“whatever it takes”* to support our residents and businesses through this crisis. The Council acted in good faith and increased spending on critical services such as supporting rough sleepers through to the work of our local community hub, which has been supporting our most vulnerable residents. We are therefore pleased to receive £1.2m from the £3.2billion of national funding that has been recently committed to the sector.

Our Covid-19 response in Cheltenham only underlines that we have the people, skills and local solutions to deliver a recovery that won't just repair the damage but will offer the opportunity for renewal, improvement and the rebuilding of strong, sustainable communities. We strongly believe that locally driven investment in projects, spaces and places will allow us to deliver tailored responses to our challenges and opportunities and allow us to play our part in a collective national effort to recover.

The principles of the last local government settlement (2016) allow authorities to spend locally what is raised locally. Cheltenham Borough Council has shown leadership in those principles and delivered a commercial strategy, with the vision *“to become an enterprising and commercially focused Council which people are proud to work for and which others want to work with.”*

However, Covid-19 has had a serious impact on the financial position for all Councils and we are therefore calling on Government to ensure local government at all levels receive an appropriate 'toolbox' to ensure we are better placed to lead recovery efforts.

We appreciate the challenge of the national situation that Covid-19 presents and so a number of options will be needed to enable this to happen and we are therefore requesting Government to consider the following:

- More favourable borrowing rates from the PWLB and other sources will enable Cheltenham Borough Council to be able to continue to take the lead on delivering jobs, housing and infrastructure
- Suspension of s.114 for flexibility in not having to deliver a balanced budget in the medium term
- The ability to borrow for revenue spending
- Increased flexibility over local taxation
- Deferment of Minimum Revenue Provision for two years
- Receive full funding for the essential additional spending we have needed to make in supporting our communities during this national emergency
- Increased direct funding for district Councils over a fixed time period to offset the local level of income lost and to give Councils time for local income streams to get back to pre-Covid-19 levels

By ensuring financial certainty and a wider recovery 'toolbox', will mean nimble Councils like Cheltenham, can continue to be drivers for growth, which will be more important than ever. We have already started to develop the Council's Recovery Strategy for the Borough, as we are prepared to take a leadership role in driving forward recovery when others have deferred and stopped investment programmes. Our ambition briefly includes:

- To make Cheltenham the Cyber Capital of the UK, which will create not only a national centre of excellence for the cyber industry but will also be an engine-room for long-term growth for Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and the wider region <https://www.goldenvalleyuk.com/>
- Cheltenham and the wider Gloucestershire are strategically placed to grow. With the USP of cyber, the M5 junction upgrades and A417 'missing link' promised in the 2020 budget, we are ready to deliver with the right tools put in place
- We already have plans in place to progress to the second stage of a major public realm and environmental habitat upgrade in conjunction with the County Council
- Through the Council's ALMO we have arranged a £100m housing investment plan, which will not only increase the supply of affordable homes, but support wider regeneration and jobs growth- <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/cheltenham-borrows-100m-to-fund-almo-housebuilding-drive-58704>
- While we are all dealing with an international crisis we are determined to look for the benefits where possible whether it be finding permanent housing for those previously sleeping rough or tackling climate change

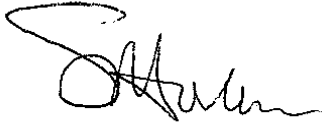
We are well placed to lead this work as we have an established range of strategic partnerships through; Cheltenham BID, Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnership, Development Task Force and the Voluntary & Community Sector, which bring together local knowledge, skills, innovation, expertise and community networks.

We have demonstrated that investment around place shaping can drive growth and innovative Councils like Cheltenham, have the track record, ideas, ambition and skills, but needs to ensure it has the financial certainty and 'toolbox' of support to play a key role in leading economic and community recovery.

Finally, we give our grateful thanks to the thousands of key workers and volunteers across health and front-line services both in Cheltenham and nationally that have responded so selflessly to keep the country going and to care, protect and shield us from Covid-19. We are proud to witness the strength and resilience of our town in the face of this challenge.

I would welcome a meeting to discuss recovery and the scale of our aspiration for Cheltenham's recovery directly and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Jordan', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Cllr Steve Jordan  
**Leader Cheltenham Borough Council**

**Cc:** Alex Chalk MP  
Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association