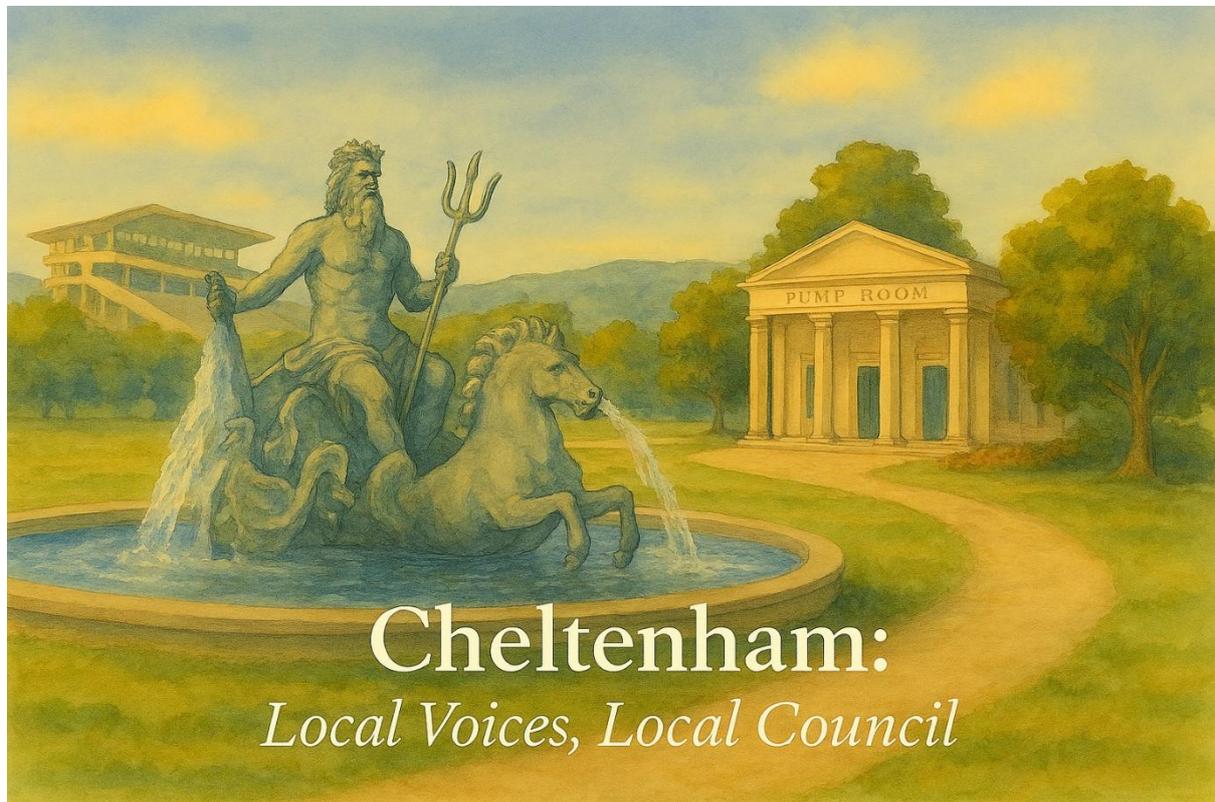


# If the Borough goes, Cheltenham Must Have a Town Council

Adam Tugwell | 25 February 2026



## Cheltenham: *Local Voices, Local Council*

As someone who has served as a Borough Councillor (Tewkesbury), Town Councillor (Tewkesbury Town), and Parish Councillor (Ashchurch Rural), and who has long-standing ties across Gloucestershire, I find it deeply regrettable that the county and its six districts are now being pushed toward amalgamation.

The direction of travel appears clear: the creation of two unitary authorities that absorb all responsibilities currently held by the different tiers of local government.

The financial crisis facing councils is well known, and [Gloucester City Council's reported bailout](#) only underlines the severity of the situation. But the argument that "efficiency" now requires the dissolution of district councils and the centralisation of services into large unitary bodies rings hollow. Yes, some service delivery efficiencies may exist - but they are far from the whole story.

In reality, councils have been sharing services for years. Ubico is a prime example that people local to Gloucestershire can consider: a jointly owned company delivering waste and street services across multiple authorities.

Legal services are similarly pooled between some of the different local authorities, with officers in one district often handling caseloads for several others. Shared services already exist, and they work.

What does *not* make sense is the idea that the councils themselves - the democratic bodies, the meetings of elected representatives - must be dissolved simply because services can be delivered jointly.

The push toward unitary authorities is not really about efficiency. It is about centralising democratic power into fewer, more distant hands. And at a time when many people already feel disconnected from those elected to represent them, this shift will only widen the gap.

The public is being told there is “no alternative”. But that is not true. There is no reason why local councils - parish, town, borough, district - cannot remain as democratic bodies and points of public contact, even if services are delivered from a centralised structure. The technology exists. The administrative cost would be modest. And the democratic value would be significant.

Fewer decision-makers do not lead to better decisions, especially when those decision-makers are further removed from the communities they serve.

It may be inevitable that Gloucestershire’s councils are amalgamated. The system has become too unwieldy, too financially fragile, and too dependent on a model that is no longer sustainable. But if Cheltenham Borough Council is abolished, we must not allow a democratic vacuum to form in its place.

A Town Council - even one with limited powers - would still provide local oversight, local accountability, and a local voice.

It would be far better than having nothing at all, especially when major decisions affecting Cheltenham may soon be made by people who do not live here, do not work here, and may have little connection to the town beyond a line on their job description.

Democracy should never be treated as an optional extra or a cost to be cut. The influence of money on public life is already too great, and the erosion of local representation only accelerates that trend.

If the Borough goes, Cheltenham must have a Town Council. And every community across Gloucestershire that loses a tier of representation must have a parish or town council to replace it.

Local democracy matters - and within this system, once lost, it is rarely restored.

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