

AGENDA ITEM (6) - MEMBER QUESTIONSQuestion from Councillor Nikki Ind to Councillor Mike Every Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance

'Could you please confirm when the Electric Vehicle Charging Point procurement tender process is due to re-commence for Tetbury and can you also confirm that the Town Council will be consulted and involved in the selection of suitable sites and equipment?'

Response from Councillor Every

The project to install electric vehicle charge points (EVCPs) at car parks across the District has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, four points will be delivered when the Whiteway Car Park at Cirencester Rugby Club opens in September. Work on the location, procurement and installation of EVCPs in other car parks across the District has restarted with a view to decisions to go ahead on these being taken in the autumn. Town and Parish councils in these locations will be engaged when plans for the car parks have been prepared.

Question from Councillor Stephen Andrews to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

'Officers and Staff of the Council are to be congratulated on the way that they responded to the COVID-19 emergency whilst at the same time ensuring that "normal business", such as that of dealing with Planning Applications and Planning Enforcement, continued.

One such area of "normal business" has been that the Government has continued with its consultations on key aspect of policy, including areas key to the future of Cotswold District.

Would the Leader list those consultations that have been responded to since the 11th March and provide members with a copy of the submitted responses that have been provided on their behalf?

Response from Councillor Harris

I have been unable to identify any Government consultations issued since 11 March which relate to areas key to the future of Cotswold District. Officers are diligent in identifying and responding to such consultations and the only Government consultation I am aware of which has received a response since that date is that relating to National Fraud Initiative Fees, which I do not consider to be key to the future of this district. You will recall, I am sure, that there was a Government consultation on the Future Homes Standard earlier this year, but our response to that was agreed by Cabinet at its February meeting, well before the Covid-19 lockdown commenced. I can assure you that there have been other consultations which have been responded to since 11 March, albeit not from the Government. Responses have been provided by officers to consultations from Gloucestershire County Council on its draft Local Developer Guide and its emerging Local Transport Plan, and a report is currently being prepared for consideration by the Audit Committee at its next meeting setting out a

draft response to the Local Government Association's current consultation on a proposed Model Code of Conduct, for its consideration.

Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Forward Planning

'At the Council meeting held on July 3rd 2019, a motion to investigate installing solar panels on the Trinity Road Office building was unanimously approved by this Council, based on a review that was to have been concluded in 6 months. We are now 12 months on and I am unaware of any plan being in place and would ask Councillor Coxcoon what action will take place to carry out the Council's decision?'

Response from Councillor Coxcoon

An energy survey of Trinity Road was undertaken in April 2020, which included an assessment of the potential for solar PV installation. The survey showed that the roofs of Trinity Road could accommodate panels with an installed capacity of around 140kWp. For context, this would meet around one quarter of the building's current electricity consumption, save around 10% of greenhouse gas emissions from the building, and achieve a financial payback of roughly 10 years.

The payback period for this investment would be reasonable in the context of the Council's key 10 year climate targets to a) Make the Council's own activities net-zero carbon as soon as possible, aiming for an 80% reduction against a 1990 baseline by 2030, and b) to achieve 100% clean energy use across the Council's full range of functions as soon as possible, and not later than 2030. However any such investment requires reasonable certainty that the building will be occupied, and have a similar electricity demand to the present, for at least the next ten years.

Officers are considering the longer term impact of the Council's use and need for office space as a whole which has been significantly impacted by the Covid -19 pandemic. The ability to maintain services during the lockdown period has shown the potential for different ways of working which could have a significant benefit in the reduction, at source, of carbon emissions for our office buildings. Solar panels have a useful part to play in reducing carbon emissions, but the ongoing review of how the building should be used may yield greater savings, and needs to be resolved before a 10 year payback investment can be justified on this building.

Officers are considering the potential installation of solar panels at other sites, which could be significantly larger installations, may provide greater certainty of long term electricity use, and would therefore (if feasible) be a better investment case. Other substantial opportunities for renewable energy generation and consumption are likely to come forward in due course, both building mounted and free-standing, and officers will actively pursue these as they emerge.

Options are also being considered on opportunities to provide or invest in renewable energy projects such as substantial ground-mounted solar farms. For example having the ability to buy electricity from such an installation could satisfy all or most of the Council's electricity demand.

Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

'At least a year ago we were preparing to design and build 8 sheltered properties in Kemble at the Community Gardens. Since then discussions have taken place but plans do not appear to have moved forward. Please could Councillor Spivey kindly give us an update on this site and given the prominence given to sheltered housing in this administration's manifesto, when will we see some action in this direction?'

Response from Councillor Spivey

Officers are progressing the project in line with previous Cabinet decisions. At its meeting in February 2019 the resolution was that 'community-led housing options be supported and an appropriate business case be developed'. Consultation has been carried out with the local community as part of this previous Cabinet decision to understand the community's intentions and ability to deliver this site for an affordable housing scheme.

As one of the Council's priorities it is the intention to provide housing which is truly affordable both in terms of rent and running costs by seeking to deliver on both the priority of social housing and climate change. Work is progressing on the feasibility of delivering against this need and a report will be presented to Cabinet shortly which will consider this overall strategy together with the development of Council owned sites, including Kemble.

A cross party Affordable Housing Board has been set up to review the proposals for housing delivery, with its first meeting anticipated within the next few weeks.

Question from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Andrew Doherty, Cabinet Member for Environment , Waste and Recycling

'Residents continue to regularly contact us with complaints of missed rubbish collections. Could you please explain the reasons behind the resurgence of failed collections?'

Response from Councillor Doherty

The launch of the new waste service in March was a massive undertaking and teething problems would have been expected. Launching the service in parallel with the first major pandemic in a century was less foreseeable and that led to considerably more difficulties.

The majority of issues occurred in the early part of the new service launch - when we had maximum disruption from staff absences. Cotswold has been more adversely affected than

other authorities by staffing issues and the resulting gaps in local knowledge. Unlike some of our neighbouring authorities we have a minimal number of other staff, such as grounds maintenance, available to help in an emergency.

The customer service and waste teams have put in a great deal of work to identify and resolve persistent problems in collection. The level of missed collections is now greatly reduced and continues to decline. We're now down to less than 40 missed collection calls per day. That's less than 1% of the daily scheduled collections. However, that is still higher than should be considered acceptable so work continues to reduce and eliminate those remaining misses.

Question from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Andrew Doherty, Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste and Recycling

'Please could the Cabinet Member clarify why the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on waste collection services in the Cotswold District has been so much worse than for neighbouring authorities?'

Response from Councillor Doherty

I would like to cover this in more detail than time allows, but that needs a proper walk through of the South-West Audit Partnership's (SWAP) "Waste and Recycling Service Redesign - 2019/20" audit report, and the correspondence and documentation that I have seen since becoming the cabinet member.

The service we are now running is pretty much the most complex option that could have been chosen. Anyone with involvement in large projects would recognise that running an operationally complex, staff heavy service with unique custom-built vehicles does not naturally lead to a service that is flexible, robust or resilient.

What is now known about the decision making behind the service review in 2018 would suggest that the full council was persuaded to sign up to the current service without accurate information. While the cabinet recommendation was described as "what residents wanted" and "best", the primary driver of choices behind the scenes was a desire to avoid risk and significant change - the audit report specifically notes a desire to avoid "political" risk. Behind the scenes the project was littered with risks:

- insufficient resources
- a lack of financial oversight
- minimal project management expertise
- insufficient involvement or scrutiny by the administration or executive

Over 7 years the service will cost around £34,000,000 (plus inflation). The cabinet meeting that recommended the service choice took 36 minutes, that's nearly £1m per minute.

Well before the launch date the service had already turned out to be seriously mispriced - in March 2019 the unbudgeted costs were thought to be £1,274,000 a year, by August 2019

those extra costs were down to (only) £630,000 a year. That's an extra £4.4m over the life of the service and the largest chunk of the "£1m Blackhole" described in the budget process.

The most immediate outcome of the project failings was the inability of the programme to be implemented on time. The vehicles needed were not ordered until April 2019 - not soon enough for them to be delivered for a November launch. Once it was clear that couldn't be achieved the launch date was changed to March - to miss the peak Christmas period and worst of possible winter disruption. The change to a March launch turns out to be hugely consequential given the escalating pandemic and the UK lockdown the week after go-live.

The secondary issue is the type of service recommended in 2018. The decision to avoid political risk and a naive approach to cost reduction led to a more complex service. Service complexity directly affects resilience - a dual-stream service like Stroud's (a choice which Ubico very, very strongly recommended to CDC) is much simpler. It doesn't require bespoke, customised vehicles - you put most items in together and keep going until the lorry is full. It takes a lot of material to fill a 26 tonne Rear Compaction Vehicle and fewer staff to do so. At home in lockdown, our Cotswold population produced more material than could be accommodated in our bespoke vehicles - leading directly to service failures and collections not happening on schedule. A desire to avoid hard choices and significant change led to a service with less flexibility, resilience and capacity than needed, in a large rural district that needs those things.

Ubico has pointed out that the launch went relatively smoothly considering that no council has ever made such a service change during a pandemic. But, even if so, any disruption for residents is too much; and I apologise again to all those who've been affected by the problems with our collections.

The waste service is the single most complex and costly service we deliver and it deserves more attention, scrutiny and resource than it has historically received. There are many more factors involved than I have been able to cover here. If the council wishes, then this can be explored in more detail - here in council, or in the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Having been through this experience it's incumbent on us to learn from it, to improve and ensure the service meets whatever challenges it may face in the future.

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