

(4) PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Questions have been submitted, and responses provided to question (1), as follows:-

(1) Question from Mr. David Fowles of Poulton to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

Given the following:

a) that the leader of the Council was pivotal in the decision to move the times of Council and Cabinet meetings to 6.00pm (without full consultation) to enable greater engagement with the public

b) that when in opposition he was fiercely critical of the fact that there were only ever 4 Council meetings.

c) that several member and public questions, to say nothing of the rest of the Council agenda had items that demanded his input.

d) that it was the first Council meeting of the new administration and there was an important item on the agenda - the climate emergency to which members of the public had come to hear the debate.

Cllr Harris gave his apologies and we were informed that he was away on Council business.

Could he explain what Council business was more important than him attending a diarised Council meeting and where he in fact was?

Surely there is nothing more important as leader than attending his own Council and Cabinet meetings?

Could he also explain why it was not possible for a member of his recently expanded Cabinet to attend in his place?

Would he apologise for the discourtesy his absence showed to both elected members and members of the public?

Would he commit to always attending in the future?

Response from Councillor Joe Harris

I was representing the interests of the Council, and indeed the District, at the Local Government Association Conference. Given the significant financial and other challenges facing local government, and the uncertain political situation nationally, I felt it important for me, as Leader, to attend, along with our Head of Paid Service. It is fair to say that we both found the conference extremely valuable.

Insofar as the Council Meeting was concerned, I am fortunate to have an excellent team of Cabinet Members and Officers who are more than capable of dealing with business even if I am not present – which proved to be the case.

(2) Question from Mr. David Fowles of Poulton to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

‘ Following the approval of the CDC local plan last November, the intention was that in Cirencester the Town Council would be starting on its neighbourhood development plan (which I understand has just commenced) and that CDC would start work on the Cirencester Master Plan. As I understand it nothing has happened for 10 months on the Cirencester master plan. Why not?’

(3) Question from Mr. Dom Morris of Quenington to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

‘Cllr Harris,

We farm outside an isolated village in the Cotswolds.

Late one evening I caught four men stealing our farm truck. It was not a pleasant altercation. Fortunately, my military training took over, I was unhurt, and we got our truck back. That was not the case when Coln Stores was burgled last month, and a member of our community was hurt.

When our community and its representative raised the issue of escalating rural crime in the Standard (25th July) you called us “Whingers”.

Needless to say, calling constituents who have been victims of crime ‘whingers’ came as a bit of a surprise.

But to see you taking the credit on Twitter for the Police Commissioner’s U Turn on rural crime a few weeks later after you have been on holiday and cancelled Council meetings for August was a shock.

Please could you substantiate your claim that you are responsible for the Police Commissioners newfound focus on rural crime and what made you realise that rural crime was actually an issue. Our community would also be grateful for an explanation of what substantive changes to rural policing we will see and the effect this will have upon rural crime statistics in the Cotswolds which are some of the worst in the UK (The Independent, 17 Aug, 2019).

Please could you also apologise for calling constituents that are victims of crime whingers?’

(4) Question from Mr. Dom Morris of Quenington to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

‘The internet at our 4th generation family farming business is so bad that we are unable to do online banking, invoicing or sometimes even just check our email. It also prohibits any form of diversification/expansion since no-one else would be able to conduct business with such limited connectivity.

I understand that CDC was given £500k to support the rolling out of fast broadband services in the Cotswolds by the County Council. Furthermore, that this money was supposed to be spent on hard to reach places.

Could Cllr Harris explain when he is intending to spend this money and does he agree that CDC should explore with the County Council and Gigaclear how best to spend the funds in rural communities?

Has he considered using the £500k to initiate a grant scheme for hard to reach communities and businesses like ours? Does he agree that initiatives like this would help stimulate economic development in the Cotswolds?'

Notes:

(i) Question (1) above was submitted by the time by responses are guaranteed to be provided to the questioner at least 24 hours before the Council Meeting (by virtue of the Council's Procedure Rules). As such, a written response will be provided to all Members either in advance of, or at, the Cabinet Meeting.

(ii) If the questioner is present at the Meeting, they will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or their original question.

(iii) The Member to whom any supplementary question is addressed will try and answer any supplementary question at the Meeting; but if this is not possible, then the Member will answer as much as possible at the Meeting and then provide a full response within five working days. If, for any reason, a full response cannot be provided within those five days, then a holding response will be sent to the questioner, along with the reason for delay and a likely timescale for the full response.

(iv) Questions (2), (3) and (4) above were submitted in sufficient time for them to be presented at the Meeting, but after the deadline by which responses could be guaranteed to be provided either in advance of, or at, the Meeting. As such, responses will be provided either at or within five working days of the Cabinet Meeting.

(END)