

(7) MEMBER QUESTIONS

Council Procedure Rule 11 - Not more than fifteen minutes allowed for written questions to be put by Members on any matter in relation to which the Council has any power or duties or which affects the District.

Questions have been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

(1) From Councillor Ms JM Layton to Councillor Sue Jepson, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing

'Smaller housing associations often support rural areas by building high quality affordable homes. Can the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing tell me what sort of support CDC gives to these associations in the Cotswolds, such as Cirencester Housing Association, our local provider?'

Response from Councillor Jepson

'The Council, through its Strategic Housing Team, works closely with registered providers to bring forward rural developments, helping in identifying need, assisting Section 106 Agreement discussions, and liaising with the Homes and Communities Agency to secure approval for schemes to be included in the Affordable Homes Programme - a recent example being the 11 homes in Bibury.

The Council has also provided financial support utilising commuted sums. Cirencester Housing Society received a grant in 2012 towards affordable housing provision.

Cotswold District Council is a member of the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership, which is co-ordinated by the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC). It meets regularly with housing associations and other partners to support the delivery of rural housing. The partners include the rural local authorities and registered providers which deliver rural schemes.

The partners also contribute to the funding of the GRCC's Rural Housing Enabler. The Enabler undertakes parish housing needs surveys, working with local parish and town councils; helps to identify potential housing land; and liaises with the landowners. The Strategic Housing Team combines the results of the parish surveys with other evidence bases to give as complete a picture of need as possible.'

(2) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor Sue Jepson, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing

'The Government's decision to cut council and housing association rents by 1% means that smaller providers of social housing will lose thousands of pounds worth of income. This in turn means that future schemes, like the excellent Arlington Fields development in Bibury that the planning committee recently visited, might not happen. Does the cabinet member agree that we should support smaller housing providers and that smaller developments across the District will play a big part in addressing the housing crisis across the Cotswolds?'

Response from Councillor Jepson

'Small affordable housing developments not only contribute to meeting the District's housing needs but also the sustainability of local communities and services.

All associations are affected by the rent reductions and the Strategic Housing Team is working closely with registered providers and developers to safeguard the delivery of affordable housing on schemes coming forward.

Assistance could include financial support through the use of commuted sums, different delivery models and tenures to assist viability, and through the work of the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership (referred to in my response to Councillor Juliet Layton).'

(3) From Councillor Mrs. JL Hincks to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'What is the Council doing to prevent residents being taken to court due to defaulting on council tax as a result of the spare room subsidy (bedroom tax)?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'First and foremost, there is no evidence that the application of the Spare Room Subsidy to a household's Housing Benefit claim would result in that household defaulting on their Council Tax - they are much more likely to default on their rent, which would then become a Landlord/Housing Benefit section issue rather than a Council Tax collection issue. As the Housing Benefit Team and the Housing Team are part of the same Service, those teams are able to work together, and closely with Registered Housing Providers, to find more suitable (and affordable) accommodation. While alternative housing options are being explored, we have access to the DWP Grant-Funded Discretionary Housing Payment scheme. These discretionary funds are used to top-up a household's Housing Benefit entitlement temporarily.

However, in relation to any Council Tax accounts that fall into arrears, the Council has the following provisions:

- The Council Tax Collection and Recovery Teams work proactively with all Tax Payers that fall into arrears, to avoid Court action.*
- We can offer 12 month instalment plans, rather than the standard 10 month (April to January) plans, which helps spread the liability.*
- We have a Client Support Officer within the Revenues and Housing Support Service. Their role is help residents claim all of the welfare benefits that they are entitled to, support households in tackling their debt problems, provide household budgeting advice and assist households in properly addressing their housing needs.*

- *The Council operates a Council Tax Support scheme that assists those that are on out-of-work benefits or on low incomes. The CDC local scheme is much more generous than the average national scheme (the CDC scheme minimum deduction is 8.5%, whereas many local authorities operate schemes with a minimum deduction of 20% or more).*
- *Where the Council is left with no option but to issue a summons:*
 - *We will attempt to make contact with the debtor before the court date (to try and make an arrangement and avoid Court Costs being applied to the debt),*
 - *If this fails, we will continue to attempt to make contact with the debtor after a Liability Order has been granted (to avoid further recovery action being taken),*
 - *CDC's Court Costs are well below the National Average,*
 - *Revenues Officers will endeavour to make an arrangement with any debtor at any stage of the recovery process.'*

(4) From Councillor Roly Hughes to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'Could the Cabinet member please reveal how much Council tax this authority has written off since 2011/12?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'The total sum is £358,824.84 - this covers every **complete** financial year since 1st April 2011 (i.e. excluding the current part year).

The following table provides (i) the total Council Tax written off for each complete financial year since 2011/12; (ii) the total Council Tax liability for each year; and (iii) each year's write-off total as a percentage of the total Council Tax liability for each year:

Year	Total Write Off	Total Council Tax Liability	Write Off as % of Total Liability
2011/12	£ 69,009.50	£ 51,896,133.46	0.13%
2012/13	£ 98,419.60	£ 52,776,998.09	0.18%
2013/14	£ 88,067.72	£ 54,767,054.76	0.16%
2014/15	£ 103,328.02	£ 55,778,117.80	0.18%

It should also be remembered that if, having written off a sum, we receive information about a debtor, we will review the case and, subject to no major issues, seek to pursue recovery action.

(5) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'Will the Deputy Leader please publish the latest timetable for the emerging local plan?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

'The latest timetable was set out in the Local Development Scheme approved by Cabinet on 9th July 2015; and is available on the website on the pages relating to "Emerging Local Plan" (<http://www.cotswold.gov.uk/residents/planning-building/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan/>)'

(6) From Councillor M Harris to Councillor NJW Parsons, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Forward Planning

'Would the Deputy Leader please let me know which wards in Cotswold District have had, or are likely to have, developments as a result of lost appeals since 2013?'

Response from Councillor Parsons

'On the basis of the following criteria (as confirmed by you to officers) -

- (i) your question relates to housing and other schemes;*
- (ii) your question relates to residential developments of three units or more or non-domestic proposals which exceed a quarter of an acre; and*
- (iii) your question relates to information on appeals determined after 1st January 2013;*

then the following (current) wards are impacted -

Abbey; Bourton Village; Campden & Vale; Ermin; Fairford North; Kemble; Lechlade, Kempsford and Fairford South; Siddington & Cerney Rural; Stow; Tetbury East & Rural; Tetbury Town; and Tetbury with Upton.'

(7) From Councillor Ms JM Layton to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Health, Environment and Communities

'With the recent granting of a CLEUD for Packer's Leaze vehicle depot in South Cerney it is very probable that the vehicle movements are likely to be three times the amount of the depot under SITA management. With safety in mind and a sense of community neighbourliness, will CDC undertake to ensure the provision of a cycle/footpath along the full length of Broadway Lane, South Cerney?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

'When formulating proposals relating to the depot site, we did consider the existing cycle/foot path provision in the vicinity, but it appeared that a good network already existed.'

As previously stated, the Council is committed to being a good neighbour in the event of the depot operation proceeding, and is happy to consider any practical and affordable improvements. Based on our own previous deliberations, we feel that a more beneficial

measure would be a speed limit reduction along Broadway Lane, and we are looking to progress this with the County Council.'

(8) From Councillor M Harris to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'Some 5 years' ago the Cirencester branch of SCOPE contributed £500 to the leisure centre to help disabled people get in and out of the swimming pool. They report that this facility has not been deployed and every time they enquire, they are pushed from pillar to post. Would the Leader please tell me when this facility will be installed, or when Scope can retrieve their donation, presumably with interest?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'During the handover phase of the leisure management contract in August 2013 the Council was approached by Sports and Leisure Management (SLM) who had received a cheque for the sum of £7,108 from the SWIM organisation. The people involved with SWIM had fund-raised this amount with the intention of purchasing equipment that would enhance pool access for users who were unable to gain access to the pool. The key concern was to enable swimmers who were unable to 'weight bear' (i.e. needed mechanical assistance to lift from their own chair and into the water and vice versa) to use the pool. The existing provision only allowed users to hoist from the pool surround into the water, but required a manual transfer from the swimmers own chair into the poolside chair, and another transfer from the poolside chair into the pool hoist seat. We assume that Scope contributed £500 to the overall sum raised, but have no direct confirmation of this.

It is understood that, initially, the sum was fund-raised with the intention of providing an upgraded pool transfer hoist to enable a chronically-obese lady access the swimming pool (whose weight far exceeded the safe working load of the standard pool hoist at the leisure centre). Unfortunately, while funds were being raised, the lady died.

Having made contact with the lead fund-raiser, it was agreed that the Council would hold the funds and ring fence them pending agreement as to how the monies were to be spent. We then met representatives from the funding organisation and this resulted in an options paper being prepared (June 2014), with the intention of achieving a consensus so we could move ahead with procurement. The overall project costs ranged from around £13,000 to £20,000, depending on the option to be pursued, with the Council having previously guaranteed a contribution of £5,000.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to secure an agreement regarding the options due to a number of events outside of our control, involving the external groups/organisations/individuals. We have tried to move things along but, unfortunately, we are still awaiting feedback despite numerous attempts.

We have again made contact with the parties involved, to see if they wish to try to re-establish the project or if they would prefer to have the funding used for another leisure-related project, or returned (presumably for use for some other charitable purpose). We will also contact Scope, to explain the current situation and ascertain their wishes regarding their past contribution to the fund-raising.'

Notes:

- (i) If any Member who has submitted a question is present at the Meeting, he/she will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or his/her original question.
- (ii) 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.

(END)