

(6) MEMBER QUESTIONS

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

(1) From Councillor Jenny Hincks to Councillor Mark F Annett, Leader of the Council

'Next April, the Department for Works and Pensions is withdrawing help to residents to help pay mortgage interest or housing costs and replacing it with a loan.

This will affect the most vulnerable of our residents.

What is CDC doing to help mitigate the effect these new rules are having on people who need help?'

Response from Councillor Annett

The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) is switching the mortgage interest payments from a 'state benefit' to a 'state-backed repayable loan'. The loan, plus interest, will be secured against the claimant's property and become repayable once the property is sold. If, when sold, there is no equity, then the loan amount will be written off.

These payments have always been, and will continue to be, managed by the DWP. The Council has never paid housing costs to customers who own their own properties.

The Council can, and does, offer support to the most vulnerable of our residents through our Client Support Officers. These Officers are on hand to help with personal budgeting and housing advice and support, as well as ensuring customers are in full receipt of all benefits to which they are entitled.

If customers are at risk of losing their homes and we are aware of this, then we can work with them and do all we can to keep them within their homes. However, most do not approach the Council until it is too late and Repossession Orders have been served.

(2) From Councillor NP Robbins to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Environment

'Cheltenham Borough Council has recently introduced the kerbside collection of textiles, batteries and small electrical items.

We set up and share Ubico with Cheltenham so why hasn't Cotswold District Council introduced this service and does the administration plan for introducing it soon?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

Whilst we share a contractor, we have different collection vehicles. Our vehicles were configured with the correct number and size of stillages (compartments) which we required to provide the service as designed in 2012 when those vehicles were purchased. This means there are no spare stillages available to place these additional recycling materials in. We have just started reviewing the future service, as our recycling fleet is due for replacement in 2019; and this provides the opportunity to make

changes to services and potentially add the collection of these materials. There will be public consultation on this in 2018.

(3) From Councillor NP Robbins to Councillor Sue Coakley, Cabinet Member for Environment

'Has Ubico noticed an increase in the collection of Tetra Pak cartons since the closure of the recycling centre at Kingsmeadow Tesco?'

Response from Councillor Coakley

The carton bring bank at Tesco was moved to the Watermoor Car Park, so there has been no loss in provision - it has just been relocated. It is too early to compare data from cartons collected at Tesco with the cartons now collected from the Watermoor site.

(4) From Councillor Dilys Neill to Councillor Mark F Annett, Leader of the Council

'The Leader will be aware that an application for another care home in Stow was recently permitted by this authority.

The Leader will also be aware that Geoffrey Clifton-Brown recently told BBC Radio Gloucestershire that CDC need to do more affordable housing in Stow.

What plans does the administration have for delivering affordable housing in Stow?'

Response from Councillor Annett

Stow-on-the-Wold is a sensitive location, with limited opportunities for the development of housing. This affects the provision of affordable housing as the vast majority is delivered, across the District, as a result of Section 106 Agreement contributions on developer-led sites.

The Council's existing and emerging Local Plan policies support the delivery of affordable housing exception sites. The Council is actively seeking exception sites for this purpose, including in Stow-on-the-Wold, and would welcome suitable sites coming forward. Without suitable land opportunities coming forward that Housing Associations can afford, new affordable housing for local people cannot be delivered.

The Government's Written Ministerial Statement brought a change of policy which removed the need for smaller market schemes of ten units or less to provide affordable housing. Through the new Local Plan, the Council aims to introduce an Affordable Housing Commuted Sum contribution from smaller sites of between six and ten units within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which would include Stow-on-the-Wold. However, appropriate sites will still need to be found to deliver affordable housing funded through these commuted sums.

The Council encourages the development of Neighbourhood Plans. We would encourage these Plans to put forward suitable sustainable sites for housing delivery.

The Council has received funding for community-led housing and would welcome again suitable land opportunities for local community housing trusts to deliver affordable homes for local people.

(5) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor Mark F Annett, Leader of the Council

'The Leader will no doubt have seen the Social Mobility Commission's State of Nation report which ranked Cotswold District poorly in terms of general social mobility and the second worst in England in terms of social mobility for young people.

What plans does the Leader have to address this critical issue?'

Response from Councillor Annett

I read the recommendations of the Social Mobility Commission with interest. Alan Milburn, the Chair, made several recommendations that relate directly to local authorities as set out below:-

- *every local authority should develop an integrated strategy for improving disadvantaged children's outcomes and Pupil Premium funds should be invested in evidence-based practice;*
- *local authorities should support collaboration between isolated schools, subsidise transport for disadvantaged young people in isolated areas and encourage Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to follow the North East LEP's approach to improving careers support for young people;*
- *local authorities should all become accredited Living Wage employers and encourage others in their communities to do likewise;*
- *central government should launch a fund to enable schools in rural and coastal areas to partner with other schools to boost attainment;*
- *regional School Commissioners should be given responsibility to work with universities, schools and Teach First to ensure that there is a good supply of teachers in all parts of their regions;*
- *the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy should match the Department for Education's £72 million for the opportunity areas to ensure there is a collaborative effort across local education systems and labour markets;*
- *central government should rebalance the national transport budget to deliver a more equal share of investment per person and contribute towards a more regionally balanced economy.*

I think, as a Council, we would support all of these aims set out by the Commission and it should come as no surprise to us that, as a rural local authority, we suffer from a distinct lack of access to services.

Most of these recommendations relate directly to County Councils in their role as education authorities and, in these cases, I will write to the County Leader and ask him for his observations. I can, however, confirm that this Council is already working in partnership with the County Council on a range of initiatives to help disadvantaged children and young people in the Cotswolds and the following are examples of what has been achieved:-

- *youth activity funding has recently supported young disabled people, young people in need of mental health support, and young carers;*
- *we are involved in the Early Help and Safeguarding Locality Partnership convened by the County Council in the Cotswolds;*
- *working with the Voluntary Community Sector, we recently launched a Cotswold Youth Network to give better support to providers of young people's services;*

- *we are actively working with our Leisure Centres to open up access to vulnerable young people.*

In addition, through our partnership with Gloucestershire County Council, we are aiming to improve public transport within the resources available; in this regard, work will soon get underway to help understand how to improve local connectivity so as to reduce disadvantage and boost economic growth.

In respect of the things we can directly affect, I would say that as a Council we do pay our staff, as a minimum, the Real Living Wage of £8.75 per hour - not the National Living Wage - and that represents a significant improvement for staff. I have also sought the views of Publica, who of course now employ the bulk of our staff, and I can confirm that they have committed to seek accreditation a Living Wage employer.

(6) Councillor JA Harris to Councillor Mark F Annett, Leader of the Council

'Conservative MP for the Cotswolds, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, on BBC Radio Gloucestershire recently criticised Cotswold District Council saying 'the authority needs to 'get on with' implementing a Local Plan'.

He also said that current CDC policy could lead the Cotswolds to 'fossilise and die'.

Does the Leader agree with the MP?'

Response from Councillor Annett

No, I do not. Gregory Jones QC explained to Members, as part of the Housing Seminar session on 7th December that, although the Government expects Plans to be produced quickly, the planning system makes it virtually impossible for local authorities to achieve this.

The Local Plan examination hearing sessions have now finished. Unlike many examinations, the Inspector neither adjourned proceedings nor indicated any serious concerns regarding legal compliance or major soundness issues.

The Local Plan's development strategy supports a range of housing and employment policies and allocations, which will come on stream throughout the Local Plan period, for example:-

- *Housing tenures, including:-*
 - *Affordable and social rent;*
 - *Shared ownership;*
 - *Self and custom build;*
 - *Homes for elderly;*
 - *Open market housing.*
- *New employment sites;*
- *Policy support for key businesses;*
- *Contributions for apprenticeship schemes through Section 106 Agreement negotiations.*

(7) From Councillor AR Brassington to Councillor C Hancock, Cabinet
Enterprise and Partnerships

Member for

'Does the Council still have a purchasing policy? If not, why not and will it produce an environmentally-friendly one? If it has one, when was it last reviewed?'

Response from Councillor Hancock

The Council has Contract Rules which were last reviewed and approved by the Cabinet in October 2015. Environmental management is considered as part of the procurement process.

Notes:

(i) The above questions were 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, written responses will be provided to all Members either in advance of, or at, the Council Meeting.

(ii) If the questioners are 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.

(END)