

**(6) MEMBER QUESTIONS**

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

Councillor Juliet Layton to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Could Cllr Forde please update the Council on the re-opening of the Corinium Museum and the leisure centres in Cirencester, Bourton-on-the-Water and Chipping Campden. Were they reopened as and when described in the papers for Council on 29 July 2020? How have the leisure centres and the museum performed since their re-opening? What feedback have you and officers received about the re-opening?

Response from Councillor Forde

The Corinium Museum re-opened on the 3rd August and we were delighted to see visitor numbers were almost higher than the previous year - even with two days closed in August and with social distancing measures in place.

We're particularly pleased as visitors to the museum will no doubt have contributed to the local economy and the vibrancy we witnessed over the Summer.

The leisure centres re-opened for gym and group exercise on 1st August and pools for public swimming were re-opened on 15th August. Swimming lessons restarted on 22nd August.

We have seen a steady increase in people returning to our leisure centres as confidence returns. Feedback on the social distancing measures in place have been very positive.

One of the many messages I've received from residents after re-opening:

*I felt moved to email the CDC to express my gratitude at your swift, organised and safe re-opening of The Cirencester Leisure Centre. At a time when physical and mental health is at the top of all of our agendas, the centre is vital to the health and well-being of our community. My six year old daughter has missed the structure and friendships of her swimming lessons so much and even after being back in the pool just once last Saturday had greatly improved sleep. I know of many people in other areas who are still waiting for facilities to open. Wonderful to see CDC leading the way.*

*Please extend my thanks to your colleagues for the careful planning undertaken in enabling the centre to open.*

Councillor Nick Maunder to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

What is the current position regarding financial support for the operation of our leisure centres and museum? How does this compare with the forecasts presented to Members on 29 July? Can Cllr Evemy please update the Council on what, if any, financial support for them we expect to be available from the Government. If required, when will Members be asked to approve any further financial support for our contractor?

Response from Councillor Evemy

The table below shows the information provided to the Council by the SLM on an open book accounting basis for the period from April to July 2020.

	<u>Apr-20</u>	<u>May-20</u>	<u>Jun-20</u>	<u>Jul-20</u>
Income	(6,326)	(8,254)	(8,386)	(8,262)
Expenditure	149,543	156,717	148,632	178,234
Funding Government Furlough Scheme	(97,796)	(101,139)	(96,300)	(94,476)
Contribution from Cotswold DC	(18,500)	(18,500)	(18,500)	(18,500)
Gov Grant				(£25,000)
Waiver of management fee payable to Cotswold DC April to July 2020				(34,932)
SLM (Surplus)/Deficit	26,921	28,823	25,446	(2,936)

SLM is obligated to provide financial data for August by 30th September 2020. The loss of income to the Council from the SLM Management Fee of £34,932 and the contribution from the Council towards SLM costs of £74,000 total £108,932 and are in line with the report to Council on 29th July 2020.

SLM are receiving direct government financial support under the furlough scheme and have reclaimed £389,711 for the period April to July 2020. SLM have also received a £25,000 grant from this Council under the government's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme.

The Council is expecting to receive grant funding from the Government under the local government income compensation scheme for lost sales, fees and charges. It is estimated that funding of £75,000 (£6,250 per month) will be available for the

2020/21 financial year. As it stands, the Government has not committed to provide support for councils funding their external leisure providers over and above this other than through the Covid-19 grant allocation.

Officers are working with SLM on a request for further funding from November. It is important that Council is able to consider the financial data for August and key elements of financial data for September. The September data will include income from SLM Membership, collected by Direct Debit, employee costs and income from swimming lessons. A special meeting of Council will need to be arranged for later in October to discuss and agree a further funding arrangement.

#### Councillor Robin Hughes to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

The Liberal Democratic administration scrapped the Multi- Storey car park in Cirencester when they took over control of Cotswold District Council. At the time parking was becoming a serious issue and it was becoming more and more difficult to find a parking space. At the moment shops and businesses in Cirencester are suffering because of Covid and parking is not a problem. When things get back to normal parking will become a major problem again, especially with the additional 2000 or so houses that are going to be built. Shops depend on footfall and easy accessibility for shoppers, parking is a critical part of that. What solution do you have for town centre parking that allows shoppers to park close to shops and businesses enabling everyone to benefit ?

#### Response from Councillor Harris

I refer Councillor Robin Hughes to the minutes of the cabinet meeting on July 6th 2020 under item CAB 9:

*RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to pause the project for 12 months to allow a review of the parking demand in Cirencester and to consider options to mitigate the need for additional parking and promote sustainable transport solutions, (funding for this being included in the budget for the update of the Local Plan).*

As is clearly stated the plans have been put on hold not scrapped. This decision was taken 14 months after the Liberal Democrats took control of the Council not 'when they took over' as stated in your question.

If he reads the report from that cabinet meeting he'll be able to view the reasons for this deferment and the context thereof.

We're now ready to open the new Whiteway Car Park at Cirencester Rugby Club, unfortunately this is being held up by the Conservative-run County Council.

When this site is allowed to open it will provide 158 new long stay parking spaces. In turn allowing us to turn existing long stay spaces into short stay spaces in town centre car parks enabling everyone to benefit.

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

The previous Conservative administration appointed Kevin Lea on a two-year contract to oversee and manage fly-tipping in the Cotswolds. Our experience is that this important service has been well managed, it has been well rolled-out, easy to report and responses have been fast and reliable; some culprits have even been apprehended. Is it this Council's intention to retain this dedicated officer in the role on a permanent contract in light of the excellent service he has provided?

Response from Councillor Doherty

Yes, the proposed budget for 2021/22 agreed by Cabinet on 7 September contains an allocation in the base budget for this position.

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

In November 2019 Council approved the spending of £220,000 on In-Cab technology using GPS to track routes and eliminate missed collections. This technology was supposed to speed-up collections, eliminate the need for return journeys, prevent human error, enable unfamiliar drivers to follow exact routes and much more importantly, save money. Has the technology been fitted? If so when and in how many trucks and more importantly does it work?

Response from Councillor Doherty

The In-Cab project was scheduled to start shortly after the go-live of the new waste service. Unsurprisingly that schedule was disrupted by lockdown and subsequent restrictions.

We are awaiting the revised statement of works and timeline from the supplier, which is expected this week. We are planning for In-Cab technology to be introduced in February 2021. That allows time for the Christmas waste catch-ups to be completed and for crews to train with and learn to use the new technology. In the meantime our own in-house preparatory work (refining processes, ICT integration, administrative user training etc) is already ongoing and will continue up to Christmas.

Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

I am aware that CDC proposes to replace all street sign names that are in poor condition or damaged on an ongoing basis with new ones which would incorporate the Council Logo and the name of the relevant ward.

If the current administration is entering discussions with Stroud and Cheltenham to investigate creating a new unitary council with them or indeed if a single unitary for Gloucester was formed as a result of the Government's White Paper on local government reform it is possible that these new signs would soon become a historic memento of the Cotswold District Council.

In these circumstances would it be sensible not to implement these new branded CDC street signs before resolving how local government will be organised in the future?

Response from Councillor Harris

The new street sign design will include the Council's crest and the locality or parish, not the ward name. This is being done as a part of the administration's civic pride agenda which I'll be providing more information on in the coming weeks. I'd welcome the Conservative group's input into this and I've been trying to catch up with the Leader of the Conservative group on this but unfortunately he's been very hard to get hold of.

In terms of delaying any roll out my administration is not going to allow the Conservative Government's flip flopping on devolution and local government reform to affect day to day services at Cotswold District Council including the roll out of street name plates.

In the interests of accuracy I should also clarify that we've begun discussions with Stroud and Cheltenham about options for a two unitary solution in Gloucestershire not about creating a Unitary authority with both of them as you've implied in your question.

Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

During Storm Francis trees all over the Cotswolds were severely affected by the strong winds, losing their branches and in some cases the whole tree toppling over. Many of these were ash trees which provide 30% of the tree cover in this part of the country and are increasingly suffering from ash dieback which makes them brittle, and therefore vulnerable in high winds, before eventually killing them. Many of them are alongside roads and other public places including footpaths so present a danger to road traffic and pedestrians.

I understand that many landowners have been taking action by inspecting their trees in such places and where necessary felling them before they become dangerous or preferably where possible just reducing them in height as recommended.

Has CDC carried out a survey of the ash trees on the land that they own to check which are healthy and which require remedial action?

Response from Councillor Harris

Fortunately CDC does not own many ash trees. All CDC trees are inspected annually and any remedial works are carried out. In addition our tree officers carry out a 'storm watch' inspection visit of certain sites after storms.

With regard specifically to ash dieback our tree officers monitor communications from the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership Ash Dieback group and the Cotswolds and Vale Ash Dieback Forum.

Councillor Richard Norris to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

In its meeting 29<sup>th</sup> July this Council approved a grant in the sum of £222,140 to be paid to SLM, a Limited Company registered at Companies House. This grant was to support the opening of Cotswold Leisure Centres for the period August to October. It was also approved that SLM requirement to pay the Council a monthly management fee should be waived for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020 representing a loss of income to the Council of £61,411.

During the debate on an amendment proposing that these sums should be covered by a Loan from the Council to SLM rather than paid as a Grant, it became clear that you were unclear if support was being given to a Limited Company registered at Companies House or to a Charity, also described in the report as a "not for profit Trust". Following a recess, it was advised that this would be investigated, clarified and reported back.

Are you now clear on the status of the company to whom this grant and financial support has been given and are you able to describe what that status is?

Response from Councillor Forde

Firstly I'd like to make a correction - the support is '**underwriting**' not a grant. We are operating an open book accounting process so that we can verify the claims. We have an excellent team with external auditing skills undertaking the review of data provided to us.

A document setting out the corporate structure operated by SLM is attached.

Councillor Richard Norris to Councillor Jenny Forde, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

On the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019 this Council approved your proposal that one of its key 2019-2023 aims and priorities should be to “Help residents, businesses and communities to access the support they need to ensure a high level of health and wellbeing”. On the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 you informed the Cabinet that you would “continue the current work relating to the production of a District-wide leisure strategy looking at provision holistically, based on current and future needs”.

Can you provide an update on what the Health and Well Being Strategy has found so far and in particular, when it will be completed?

Response from Councillor Forde

Thank you for your interest in our Leisure Review which will inform our Leisure strategy as a major part of our Health & Wellbeing plan for the District. I’m really pleased to tell you that the lockdown actually enabled us to progress very successfully with this large piece of work.

In order to develop a Strategic Planning Outcomes model for CDC we are using Sport England’s guidance which follows 4 stages.



We are just about to complete stage 1 and 2 of the process.

National and local strategies/ priorities have been reviewed; these are shown in the diagram below:



The online survey was a huge success and closed with over 1,000 responses which is the optimum number to produce meaningful data.

I was also pleased that the main age category to fill in the survey was 55-64 years (25%). The key findings from the survey were;

- **The importance of being physically active is well understood**, with 98% considering it to be 'important' or 'very important', a figure slightly higher than our benchmark
- 57% stated that they 'definitely didn't' or 'probably didn't' do enough activity as they would like to, a figure significantly higher than our benchmark figure of 43%
- **78% of the sample stated they would like to do more**, compared to our benchmark of 51%
- **The reason for wanting to do more was overwhelmingly about 'improving/maintaining health'**, with 53% quoting this reason, followed by 'maintaining/losing weight' at 27%, a figure significantly higher than our benchmark of 15%
- 'Personal motivation/goals' and the 'accessibility/quality of local facilities', are the two most important factors when thinking about doing more activity
- 'Lower costs/prices' and 'cleanliness of facilities' were the two most important encouragement factors for using the centres/parks more

### Active Travel

- **46% stated that they would definitely like to cycle/run/walk** to their location if it was easier
- For people who are would like to cycle more, **'dedicated cycle lanes' were the number one factor** that would encourage them to use their bike more, followed by 'facilities for secure bike parking' and 'being separated from traffic' so better air quality
- **'Better dedicated footpaths' were the number 1 factor** that would encourage people to walk more

**Key dates for your information are:**

18<sup>th</sup> Sept – Draft report for stage 1 & 2.

During October – Run focus groups.

Oct/Nov – Draft report for stage 3.

Nov/Dec – Draft report for stage 4.

We're delighted that this is transpiring in many ways to be a perfect time for this review. Attitudes towards leisure and fitness are changing so dramatically tying in with our aim to be green to the core. We hope to have a final strategy in the new year.

Councillor Sue Jepson to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

The Government are wanting the population to go back to work in their workplace.

Can Cllr Harris as the Leader of this Council tell me how many of CDC staff will be coming back to work in the Trinity Rd offices and The Moreton area offices and how many will be continuing to work from home on a permanent basis.

Can you give a date for when members will be able to resume meetings in the building, ie Full Council, Planning etc

Response from Councillor Harris

I'm as keen as anybody to get staff back into the building and members meeting in person and return to some sort of normality.

However, the greatest responsibility for any political Leader is to ensure the protection of the public from harm and the continued operation of critical services. In order to ensure that the Council Offices are 'Covid secure' a number of measures have been put into place which significantly restrict the numbers of staff that can be accommodated at any given time, and an agile working strategy is now in place to allow staff to continue to work in a more flexible manner to accommodate both

business and family needs at a time when the incidences of Covid-19 are increasing across the country.

As far as formal meetings are concerned, the advice is that these are governed by the 'rule of 6' and so cannot recommence until such time as that restriction is once again relaxed. Even then, our ability to hold meetings 'in person' will be restricted by the capacity of our meeting rooms to accommodate appropriate social distancing measures although I am hopeful that when our webcasting equipment is in place we will be able to hold 'hybrid' meetings for at least some of our business.

In both circumstances we will be led by the advice from Public Health England and the Government.

Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

Please could you detail for me the names and titles of :-

- Staff directly employed (or being recruited by CDC).
- Staff employed (or being recruited by Publica specifically and exclusively for CDC).
- Any staff budgeted but not yet recruited which would fall into the above categories.

Response from Councillor Harris

The list of job titles in each category is attached as a separate document. I have not provided the names of individual officers as this would be a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations. I can however confirm that there are 17 members of staff who are directly employed by CDC; 68 members of staff employed (or being recruited) by Publica specifically and exclusively for CDC; and two posts budgeted but not yet recruited which would fall into the second category.

(END)