



Question 1

Question from Rob Gibson to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

'Homelessness in Cirencester

Homelessness is an awful situation for any individual to find themselves in and I would definitely hate to be in that position or have any of my family or friends in a similar situation. Fortunately we in Cirencester are extremely lucky to have the excellent Yellow Bus project to support the homeless community and they should be complimented on the excellent work that they are doing.

Gloucestershire County Council and the central government also supports the homeless community during the year with a number of financial contributions and support schemes.

However I have noted with concern that in the last 3 months of 2020 CDC spent according to your accounts £110 000 with a projected spend in 2020 in excess of £250 000. Please could you confirm how many homeless people CDC were supporting in Jan 2020 and how many were still being supported in Dec 2020? What is being done to reduce homelessness in terms of permanent accommodation, drug/alcohol/mental health rehabilitation and schemes to help the individuals become part of mainstream society again and or obtain employment?

It is imperative that the homeless are protected and removed from the streets where many are vulnerable and potentially exposed to crime, and with the substantial funds that I noted have been spent by CDC I would have expected the number of homeless in the Cotswolds to have been eradicated.'

Response from Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

'Thank you Chair, and thank you Mr. Gibson for your question. I have to say, as a Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, who takes this very serious issue very seriously, I'm only ever delighted to have an opportunity to talk about homelessness. It is, indeed, an incredibly important issue, and one which I am very, very welcome to have questions on to put it further into the public domain. Thank you very much for bringing this, this evening. I'm also very heartened when members of our community bring up these things because it shows yet again in the Cotswolds that we have members of the public for whom these things really, really matter and they really, really, care.

You mention the Big Yellow Bus in your question and the work that they do, however, they are one of the organisations working in the Cotswolds and I would really like to take this as an opportunity to give a shout-out to some of the others who we at CDC work in very close partnership with. Those include Juliet and Graham and everybody at Cirencester Signpost, Mary Cobbett and everybody at Citizens Advice Bureau, Cirencester Housing for Young People, P3, the Food Bank, I could go on, there's just so many brilliant people working in our district to really, really help, so I think they work tirelessly alongside

our officers and I'd really like to thank them all for all their hard work that they put into really helping the most vulnerable in our communities.

Obviously, Cotswold District Council plays a pivotal role in much of that and since I took the Cabinet role, I'm really proud to say that I have prioritised homelessness prevention and close working with the many organisations across the Cotswolds to create a proactive strategy of homelessness prevention. This includes an evaluation of our homelessness prevention strategy, which I did, almost as soon as I took position and working really closely with officers all of last year to bring forward a number of initiatives in the homelessness sphere. I've made it clear to everybody that my aim, really is to have nobody in a hotel or B&B accommodation unless that's the best place for them.

You mentioned in your question that the causes of homelessness are many and complex and likewise, the solutions are many and complex. I am really, really, proud to say that last year we allocated money to trialing a Housing First Scheme, in the Cotswolds, to deal with some of our most complex cases. The scheme does what it says on the tin, it provides a house first. We find that when most homelessness strategies and temporary accommodation and moving people into permanent accommodation, requires that they are housing ready, and in so many cases, where it's really, really, complex issues, that's just not possible.

This Housing First Scheme, where we have specialist support agencies who provide intensive and close support to those who have the most complex needs, they work with a maximum of six people. Since allocating the money last year, we have engaged Aspire to provide that support and they have a full time support worker in place. We have also partnered with a Housing Association to find the accommodation to put people in and I'm really pleased to say that we have made an initial assessment of those who this would most benefit. We have already placed two people in accommodation and are working to find a further four people the accommodation that they need.

Housing First has been a really successful scheme in America and in Europe, so I'm really proud that, finally we are having something like that in the Cotswolds. We also took steps last year to be much more proactive in our provision of temporary accommodation, I was fed up of feeling that we were always on the back foot and put people into hotels and B&B's, so I've really pushed the team and I'm really proud to say that at the end of last year, we took a three year lease on a property in the south of the Cotswolds with nine self-contained units, which is just really, really brilliant, as you mentioned, we continue to work in partnership with the County Council.

We're currently part of the ENSAP scheme which is the next step accommodation programme, which moves on from their 'Everyone-in' scheme, last year, that's gone up to £3.5m worth of Government funding to look at a range of solutions across the county, from county wide Housing First scheme, through temporary accommodation and to those really important next steps into permanent accommodation.

We also contribute to a county wide leasing scheme administered by an excellent charity P3, where they were looking to take, up to lease, up to fifty properties which our residents in the Cotswolds will have access to. I'm also really, really proud of and I want to put on record my thanks to the Housing team at CDC who work incredibly hard, day in, day out, year in, year out, and never more so than in the last year during the pandemic.

What I've seen more than anything is they've been inventive, they've been creative and they've been really, really caring. They negotiated with the Barrel Store in Cirencester and the Royal Agricultural University, amongst others to find accommodation.

We have an entire store room full of furniture and home essentials, which anybody moving into temporary accommodation and then onto more permanent accommodation might need. They really have been absolutely phenomenal and they continue to do that.

You ask about specific numbers, well unfortunately, homelessness is an ever revolving door, wherever we house one person we find that two more pop up. Normally the statistics are done, the actual count of people is done every November. I think in November 2019, we had seven people who were classified as homeless, in November this year we had four. So we are really working on that, that's still four people that we need to house, but I can tell you today and reassure you that everybody, who may find themselves on the streets, who you might see, has been offered accommodation.

Our outreach team through P3 and Street-link continue to work all the time. You've mentioned already that the causes of homelessness are complex and the solutions are complex, the mere offer of a place to sleep is not always going to be a solution for those on our streets.

Moreover since January 2020, we have made 309 placements and the Housing team have also assisted 351 households into permanent accommodation, which is no mean feat given that there was a hiatus, I think, of up to four months last year where there was no movement at all.

A report will come to Cabinet on Monday next week which will look at how we plan to allocate our homelessness prevention grant that we've received and I'm really, really pleased to see that, amongst other things, it includes a Complex Needs Prevention Officer, as what we're anticipating now is that people that we've dealt with throughout the Pandemic and who were already street homeless, many of whom we have already managed to get into accommodation, or through one of our schemes.

What we will see, unfortunately, in the coming months, with the ease of the ban on evictions, is more and more people presenting to us in housing need. The more that we can do, the earlier that we can do that, in terms of intervening and preventing is much better.

You say, your words were, remove from the streets and eradicate, in your question, but I do think that, perhaps these are not quite the right terms. What we want to do here and what we are really, really, working hard at Cotswold District Council to do is prevention and support and partnership working with many agencies.

We live in a small close knit community, as you said, you've seen people on the streets, I can reassure you again today, that everyone you might see on the streets, has been offered accommodation, but if ever you are worried the best thing to do contact Street-link, www.streetlink.org.uk. They will immediately contact P3 who are outreach workers and an outreach worker will go out and will make contact and see what we can do.

I hope that gives you an overview of some of the work that we are doing and what we are constantly doing and that we are striving to do every single day to help those who are the most vulnerable in our communities.'

Supplementary question from Mr. Gibson

‘Thank you Councillor Spivey, that was an amazing answer, thank you very much, my only concern following on from that is, with the potential evictions increasing during the course of this year, when Covid is finally lifted, the restrictions on evictions are removed, has the Council got any financial provision or additional support that may be, unfortunately, looming on the horizon, because at the moment, what you’ve done is absolutely amazing and fantastic and I compliment you and the other individuals and organisations for doing what you’ve done, but I’m really concerned about the future.’

Response from Councillor Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

‘Very quick response, that is the Cabinet paper that is coming on Monday, £132,000 of homelessness prevention grant which we are using to get a Complex Needs Officer, we are also putting in money which is for rent deposits, etc. All the papers should be in the public domain and you will see how we are planning to use that money, but absolutely the team remains committed.’

Question 2

Question from Mr Fowles to Councillor Doherty, Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste and Recycling

‘Can I just ask for a point of clarification? Last meeting I was under the impression that we could ask a supplementary, then I was told that we can’t. This evening you’ve allowed Mr. Gibson a supplementary, what’s the current ruling on supplementaries?’

Councillor Robbins replied that a supplementary was allowed but if the original question contained two questions, only one supplementary would be allowed.

‘My first question is to Councillor Andrew Doherty on fly-tipping. It was refreshing to hear that as the portfolio holder for the Environment, Councillor Doherty has responded positively to suggestions from Councillors Julia Judd and Tony Berry and that you are planning to increase the fly-tipping budget by £50,000 and I gather you may well be retaining the post of the fly-tipping officer, both really important developments for our countryside.

That said, I also note with some alarm that you are increasing the cost of the fortnightly garden waste service, I know that you were intended to do this last year, but deferred it, it is now going up from £30, to £40, which when the Conservatives ran the Council is was obviously £30 a weekly service and now it’s going to be £40 for a fortnightly service, which is by my maths 165% increase. I also note that you are increasing the cost of the bulk collection service from £14 to £25, which is a further 75% increase.

I remember the days when we used to collect bulk waste for nothing and when we started to charge, there was an alarming increase in fly-tipping of substantial bulky items.

So could you please explain the logic that given the unemployment figures in the moment in the county are 5.7% and the prospect of more job losses at the end of lockdown when people would be finding it difficult to survive that we may be well entering a period of, let’s call it, waste collection musical chairs, whereby your price increases will massively increase fly-tipping and will

wipe out the additional £50,000 that you are kindly going to allocate on fly-tipping. I would welcome your views'

Response from Councillor Doherty, Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste and Recycling

'There's a few points in there, in terms of the £50,000 that was mentioned, I believe we are going to be talking about that later in the meeting, so I'll leave that aside for the minute. The conversations about garden waste bins and fly-tipping do tend to come up a lot, so it is worth noting that I have looked into this in quite long detail and talked to the teams, both our own internal teams and the Ubico teams that do the collection and there isn't actually any evidence that it has any effect on, what I think you're thinking of, in terms of green waste tipping. As I think we are also going to talk about a little later, most of the problems with green waste tipping are from large scale operators and clearance of gardens where people have not bothered to get an insight as to why the clearance operation they are getting is so cheap, and have not undertaken their statutory duty to check that the person clearing it has got a waste licence. The reason those clearances are so cheap, is because the people doing it had no intention of putting it in the right place, in the first place. That's where the bulk of our green waste for fly-tipping actually comes from, it does not come from people who would normally be putting it into a green bin.

In terms of the pricing, generally, the main observation to make there, we've talked a lot about the pricing around the garden waste service and the reasons why it was priced originally, as it was in particular in relation to the fact that it included the food element, which is part of the statutory responsibility we've got and it was important to be encouraging the food collections. Now that that is collected separately, that obviously significantly affects the cost of the service.

Moreover the main thing in terms of our approach to the costs, is we've been quite clear and we have talked to the public about this, is ensuring that the cost that we charge reflects the cost of delivering services, so they are not unduly subsidised, again I believe, I've talked at length about this in terms of the unfairness of flat owners and people who don't have gardens, subsidising the garden waste service for people who live in manor houses and things that are similar.

What we have done, we are increasingly introducing, across all of the services, and this is true of bulky waste service as well, heavily discounted prices for people who are on, for example, local council tax support. This was not in place in the previous administration. That for us is much more important, having a fair price for the service enables us to ensure that the service is delivered much more cheaply for those who can least afford it, and that would be my approach in terms of dealing with those who find the cost of these services more problematic.

We want to incorporate it into the local council tax support scheme, and we want that scheme to cover all the different services that the Council provides so we can discount prices for those who find affordability a problem.'

Mr Fowles thanked Councillor Doherty for his full answer.

Question 3

Question from Mr. Fowles to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

'As one of the several CDC Cirencester Councillors and one of the two Gloucestershire County Councillors for Cirencester along with you Chairman, I feel that Councillor Harris is uniquely placed to be engaging with GCC, the local flood authority and very aware the need to generate as much budget as possible to conduct flood alleviation work in Cirencester and the Cotswolds. Could he please explain why he voted last week, on 17 February, along with his Liberal Democrat group, in a recorded vote at the County Council to reduce the County Council drainage budget by £127,000 which I note was defeated. Had this gone through the second part of this question is, how many properties does he believe would be affected in Cirencester. So why did you vote that way, Councillor Harris? I would be most grateful for your answer, and if it had gone through do you have a view on how many houses might have been affected in Cirencester?'

Response from Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

'Well, there you go again David, you know, the Conservatives in Nottinghamshire, were sent a dossier that told them to use the Trump Play Book, weaponise, fake news, my goodness, they are applying that here in Gloucestershire, aren't they, because, I don't know about you, but in the recent flooding events, I saw Cotswold District Council taking the lead, we didn't see much of Thames Water, but we did see them on the ground, we didn't see much of the Environment Agencies, but we did see them on the ground.

One agency, you know, probably missing the most, was the lead flood authority, the County Council, so I suggest, David, you go away and you have a word with Mark Hawthorn and with Vernon Smith and with Nigel Warren, your merry bandwagon of conservative colleagues over at Shire Hall and you get on the phone to them.

For years and years and years, flooding has been an issue that has been talked about, the buck has been passed, as far as I'm concerned, while I'm the Leader of this authority, and know while Andy is the Cabinet Member for flooding, we're taking this issue seriously, we're going to take a lead on it and we're going to get real meaningful change in the Cirencester area.

While you were the Cabinet Member, there was some good schemes that happened, I will admit that, there were some good schemes that the District Council did up in the North Cotswolds, but as per usual, Cirencester got forgotten, not anymore, we are going to make sure that we hold Thames Water to account, that we hold the County Council to account, that we hold the Environment Agency to account.

Actually, while we are on that, let's just look at the record when it comes to infrastructure in Gloucestershire and drainage, I don't know about you, but I've driven round Cirencester, on the way to the shops and on the way to the District Council, the last couple of days, well there's flooding on the roads, the drains are all backed up and as far as I'm concerned that's a County responsibility, isn't it, for the Conservatives.

I think the Conservatives have been running the County Council for sixteen years, haven't they, so before taking us to task on flooding and maintenance of drains, etc, have a word with your own Conservative colleagues at the County Council.

To finish, I think residents have a very clear choice in May, they can vote for sixteen more years of the same, and you know, holes in our roads, drains not working and backing up, or they can vote for a fresh alternative, they can vote for the Lib Dems and they can vote for a party that's going to get serious on flooding and take it seriously and take it forward. Thank you.'

Councillor Maclean, who represented the Green Party, wanted to clarify that, for the record, there were other options, other than, Conservative or Lib Dem.