

## MEMBER QUESTIONS

### **Question from Councillor Nikki Ind to Councillor Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Forward Planning**

In addressing the Climate Emergency, Health & Wellbeing of residents and Economic Development in our District and following the pandemic, where it has become clear that the people best placed to make decisions regarding their Town/Parish are those living there, could I please ask the following:

When infrastructure is being planned for installation throughout the District, will there be a formal system to engage with the Town/Parish, to allow a structured approach, addressing any local issues – initially I am thinking of Electric Charging Points.

Whilst I appreciate that there is a procurement system with approved providers, is there a system to allow for local companies, currently not on the approved list of providers, to be considered for such tenders. If not, would the Administration consider supporting local businesses in the supply of services to the District Council?

#### **Response from Councillor Coxcoon:**

This is a two-part question, so I will take the parts separately:

Firstly, with regard to engaging with Town and Parish councils on where EV charging infrastructure would be needed, it is definitely our plan to do this. As you will be aware, we recently approved funding for our own Sustainable Transport Lead, and interviews for this post have now completed. More details on this appointment to follow, later this month.

A large part of this new officer's role is to engage with communities across the district, and in particular our principal settlements, to understand the barriers that local residents face to adopting more sustainable transport modes. This includes EV uptake, but also needs to look more widely at modal shift to active transport, public transport, and other opportunities such as community car clubs etc. As part of this review, the new officer will be making contact with Town and Parish councils.

Secondly, with regard to the procurement of EV charging points and the involvement of local suppliers, I should first explain that the procurement is via a Framework, the Crown Commercial services framework, which enables us to seek mini tenders from suppliers who have already been through initial vetting to be placed on the Framework. If we do not use a Framework approach we would have to go through a full procurement on 'Find a Tender' (the new procurement portal that replaces the OJEU procurement processes, now that the Brexit Transition Period has ended). This is a very lengthy and resource intensive process.

Using a Framework means only suppliers already on that Framework can bid, so local suppliers cannot join in now, unless they are already registered on that framework. At this stage, if we wanted to specifically offer the opportunity to local suppliers we would have to stop this procurement process and start again with the full blown 'Find a Tender' portal process. Even if that were done, the Council still couldn't specifically state that it wants to appoint a local supplier as the system requires a fully open procurement, so anyone can bid. We could potentially score local suppliers higher on criteria like their green credentials (less travel) and on social value but not enough that the Council could slant the whole evaluation in favour of local suppliers. The key criteria are that the Council needs to be sure we can procure the right product, using a supplier with a green company ethos and creativity and innovation to support us in more creative solutions. A local supplier would be great but cannot be the key driver with this sort of technical solution.

A final thing to bear in mind is that the current EVCP framework tender is covering three different Publica Councils. Although each would agree and pay for separate schedules of EVCP installations, doing it this way gives the Council more buying power and makes us more attractive to suppliers for a contract of this nature. A supplier that is local to one Publica council may not be local to another, and if CDC choose to step out of this procurement and start again now to focus on our own local supply we would lose that potential group buying power, set an already delayed process back further, and potentially result in higher costs, without necessarily achieving a demonstrable increase in sustainability credentials.

**Question from Councillor Nikki Ind to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness**

'When working in partnership with Bromford Housing and other Housing Association providers in the District, regarding the advancement in technology now available to the Social Housing sector, would the Administration consider making an allocation of grant funding for such schemes? I am thinking specifically of remote tools, which I understand are currently being used by some in the Social Housing sector, these allow the efficient checking of a property's condition and performance, combating mould and disrepair and therefore improving housing conditions. I have recently been looking into one such product, where the results reported include - more effective engagement with residents using digital tools, empowering them to reduce their energy consumption and ensuring that homes are compliant. Such technology could have an impact on not only the Health & Wellbeing of residents but could also play a part in the Climate Strategy work being undertaken by the Council.'

**Response from Councillor Spivey:**

Whilst this sort of technology could be beneficial, the Council would seek to encourage Housing associations to fund this sort of installation for their tenants or to apply for National funding should suitable funding become available.

The District Council does not have a grant fund set up that could be allocated for this purpose.

The focus of this administration is on working with housing partners and developers to bring forward additional social rented and affordable housing in our district to help tackle the housing affordability crisis.

That is why we adopted a delivery strategy in February and then subsequently allocated a significant amount of capital funding to increase the provision of affordable housing at two sites in Davies Road, Moreton in Marsh and Sunground, Avening.

### **Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council**

At our meeting in July 2020 , I was informed that solar panels were not being considered for our Trinity Road premises because the overall use of this site was being reviewed.

Please could you tell me :

- 1.If this review has been completed ?
2. If not, when is it's future likely to be decided?
3. How much money has been spent on the Reception Area and any other parts of the property since July 2020.

### **Response from Councillor Harris:**

The review has not yet been completed. The review is a complex piece of work which needs to take account of an assessment of office space needs by Publica in light of the agile working strategy we previously agreed with them. This piece of work is currently being conducted to tie in with gradual loosening of lockdown arrangements in the wider economy to ensure any 'back to office' strategy meets safe working requirements and the needs of this council. It also needs to take account of condition surveys of this building, which will set out the short, medium and longer-term costs of Trinity Road in its current service configuration. This piece of work has recently been concluded and is currently being assessed by the property maintenance team to feed into the review. When the condition analysis is completed and the office space requirement concluded (expected in summer),

officers will bring forward options for future utilisation of Trinity Road for members consideration.

Since July 2020, £36,220 has been spent in respect of the refurbishment of the Reception, Front of House and interview rooms at Trinity Road to make them more accessible and COVID safe. £6,050 was spent collectively on the refurbishment of the Chief Executive, PAs and Communications Offices. All other expenditure in respect of Trinity Road relates to reactive and servicing (compliance) work which is essential.

**Question from Councillor Julian Beale to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills**

In correspondence on February 3rd relating to the payment of the Additional Restrictions Grant, you advised a constituent in my Ward that "some (Councils) have had the resources to make payments faster, but the previous administration at CDC significantly cut our resources."

Would you please amplify your comment to substantiate this claim?

**Response from Councillor Dale:**

Some Councils includes, as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, Swindon Borough Council which employed 2626 employees (excluding schools) ([Swindon.gov.uk](http://Swindon.gov.uk)) and confirmed on its own web site pages "it may take a couple of weeks to process and pay grants to eligible applicants". By comparison, Publica Group Ltd is reported as having 125 employees at its Trinity Road Site in March 2021. (LinkedIn)

This story began with the sharing of a chief executive in 2008 (a 50% cut) followed by HR and Financial Services in 2012 and ICT in 2016. By 2017 savings of 20-25% were heralded on total operating budgets whilst highlighting (in Publica's own report) "Uncertainty around who to contact or how to get things done". In April 2010, there were 39 employees in Revenues and benefits and now (December 2020) 10 years later, there are 26. This is a cut of 34%.

Further independent commentary, from the LGA independent review panel said, when assessing this Council shortly after more than 16 years of Conservative leadership:

“the current structure lacks the capacity CDC needs and this has the potential to not only negatively impact on the organisation’s ability to meet the expectations of the administration, but also poses a risk to the council’s ability to operate safely.”

We’re rebuilding the Council so we can invest in the Cotswolds.

**Question from Councillor Steve Trotter to Councillor Juliet Layton, Chair of Planning and Licensing Committee**

Can the Chair of the Planning Committee please advise how many and what percentage of applications referred by Ward Councillors were rejected for consideration by the Planning Committee:

- 1) In the year 2020 up to November?
- 2 From November 2020 to date , up to and including March 2021?
3. What percentage of Officers recommendations were overturned by the Planning Committee from November 2020?

Finally how does this process and percentage of rejected Ward Councillors referrals compare with the Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils ?

**Response from Councillor Layton:**

1. The Planning Schedule Report Review Panel meetings have been operating since the Planning Protocol was adopted by Council on 18th November 2020 so there are no statistics to report on up to November 2020.
2. Note: as the Review Panel was created following the November Planning & Licensing Committee, items from the November meeting are not included within this data. From November 2020 to March 2021, 10 applications have been considered by the Review Panel, 4 (40%) of which were referred to the Planning Committee and 6 (60%) of which were delegated to Officers to determine.
3. A total of 13 applications were reported to the Planning & Licensing Committee between November 2020 and March 2021 (inclusive) and the Committee overturned 2 (approx. 15%) of the Officer recommendation.
4. With regard to your final question it is not possible to compare statistics with the Forest of Dean or West Oxfordshire as no similar mechanisms exist.

**Question from Councillor Claire Bloomer to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council**

A number of residents in my ward have written to me about a lack of waste bins on the estate. Please could the Leader look at installing some to help reduce litter and dog fouling as part of the civic pride agenda?

**Response from Councillor Harris:**

Absolutely!

A key plank of the Council's civic pride agenda is taking stock of infrastructure such as bins in all communities across the Cotswolds.

I will arrange a walk about in your ward so you can show me where the greatest need is and we'll get some installed.

**Question from Councillor Roly Hughes to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council**

Many of the street signs on the Chesterton estate are looking tired and in some cases are completely missing. Will the Leader commit to replacing street signs on the Chesterton estate by the end of the year?

**Response from Councillor Harris:**

The roll out of the Council's new street signs is a key plank of the Civic Pride agenda to enhance the street scene.

If Cllr Hughes can compile a list of street signs in his ward that need replacing and send this to me I'll get the request in as soon as possible and look to get them installed by autumn.

**Question from Councillor Roly Hughes to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council**

Many hedges from properties in Chesterton are overgrown and obstruct the pavement making it difficult for people to pass. What can CDC do to tackle this issue?

**Response from Councillor Harris:**

This is a really important issue and one that Councils used to be very proactive on. We'll ensure that this is on the work plan for the new Civic Pride officer.

Our strategy will be to encourage homeowners and tenants to take personal responsibility for cutting their hedges back. Most already do this but in the few cases where this doesn't happen we'll write to them and if we don't see action we will look at more robust options available to us such as cutting the hedges back and leaving the cuttings on the property.

**Question from Councillor Juliet Layton to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance**

During and following the debate on the Council's budget on 24 February much has been said and written about the Council's overall financial position and the decisions taken by the current Administration. In particular, comments have been made about the funds available for the Council's capital programme and its use of revenue reserves.

Can the Deputy Leader please explain the Council's capital position in high level terms and how the Administration is using capital investments and revenue reserves to deliver on its Corporate Plan priorities

**Response from Councillor Evemy:**

The Council holds capital reserves which reflect the balance of capital income less capital expenditure funded from capital reserves. Income comes from the sale of capital assets, usually land and property disposals, loan repayments or grants which must specifically be spent on capital investment. When the Council transferred its housing stock to Fosseyway Housing Association Ltd a capital receipt was received from the sale of the stock. The Council has been using this receipt to fund its capital programme ever since, reducing the capital reserves over time. The Council has not therefore needed to use borrowing to fund its capital expenditure and is debt free.

As at 31/3/2019 the Council held £16.47 million of capital resources. During the 2019/20 financial year, the Council used £6.45 million of these funds to: replace the cyclical replacement of recycling vehicles (£3.25 million), acquire a strategic asset in Dyer Street Cirencester (£2.18 million), fund investment in the Corinium Museum (in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund) and to fund routine capital expenditure such as Disabled Facilities Grants and investment in Council ICT. As at 31/3/2020, the Council held £10.02 million in capital resources.

The Council holds earmarked revenue reserves for three distinct purposes: to build up funds over a number of years to provide funding for cyclical operational events, such as the District elections which occur every four years, to provide funding to manage risk, and to provide for

investment in initiatives or projects which support the Council's Priorities. The balance of earmarked reserves held for specific purposes and the balance of earmarked reserves available for investment in the Council Priorities as at 31/3/2019 and 31/3/2020 is set out in the table below.

	<b>31/3/2019</b>	<b>31/3/2020</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Council Priorities Fund - available for investment in priorities	3,918,462	4,044,844
Earmarked Revenue Reserves – set aside for specific purposes	4,390,112	3,766,734

Our Administration set out its Priorities in the Corporate Strategy passed in September 2019 and has prudently allocated funds from the Council Priorities Fund to facilitate delivery of those Priorities.

The Council is facing a financial cliff-edge from changes to central government funding. The risk is a reduction in business rates income, New Homes Bonus, Rural Services Delivery Grant and Lower Tier Support Grant. In total, the risk is £3.1 million in 2022/23 and £0.7 million in 2023/24. The table below sets out the risk of funding cuts included in the recently approved Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **Risk to Government Funding**

	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£
Loss of growth in business rates income	380,000	0
Loss of New Homes Bonus	1,428,000	665,000

Rural Services Delivery Grant and Lower Tier Support Grant	1,323,000	0
<b>Scale of the challenge</b>	<b>3,131,000</b>	<b>665,000</b>

In order to address this financial challenge, the Council has approved a Recovery Investment Strategy which will deliver investment in the Council Priorities of increased provision of social housing, addressing the climate change emergency and enabling green economic recovery while also increasing income to the Council, thereby making the Council financially sustainable. The Council has recognised that delivering these priorities cannot be achieved with the current level of capital and revenue reserves. Therefore, the ability to fund capital investment from external borrowing of up to £54 million has been included. The cost of interest and repayment of debt has been included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy approved in February 2021.

Our Administration has been clear where the funding for its investments in its Priorities is coming from. This is shown below.

	<b>Council Priorities Fund £</b>	<b>Capital Committe d £</b>	<b>Provisio nal Allocati on £</b>
Making the Local Plan Green to the Core including Local Transport Officer	850,000		
Recovery Investment Strategy including Economic Development	350,000		
Health and Wellbeing Strategy	50,000		
Climate Change Studies	105,000		

Preparation for devolution	75,000		
Improving communications	40,000		
Addressing resident concerns over Public Open Spaces	25,000		
Provision for strategic property purchases - Capital			3,465,000
Provision for strategic property purchases - Council Priorities Fund (revenue contribution)			1,875,000
Replacement street and district signage	20,000		
Housing and Homelessness prevention	53,000		
Civic Pride	200,000		
Investment in car parking at Rugby Club Cirencester		390,000	
Investing in Ubico to improve efficiency and reduce carbon emissions		200,000	
Electric Vehicle Charging Points and other climate emergency investment			600,000
Ubico vehicle replacement programme		2,080,000	
Rural Broadband			500,000
Investment in leisure facilities			1,580,000

Webcasting		80,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,768,000</b>	<b>2,720,000</b>	<b>8,020,000</b>

**Question from Councillor Mark Harris to Councillor Andrew Doherty, Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste and Recycling**

My ward was particularly badly hit over the Christmas period by flooding. Please can the cabinet member give feedback on the recent residents flood forum meeting that the Council held and also the MP's flood meeting. Please can he also outline what he sees Cotswold District Council's role is with respect to flooding moving forward.

**Response from Councillor Doherty**

The resident's flood forum was extremely useful in cementing our understanding of the risks and issues that residents faced in the flooding this winter. It confirmed our understanding of the main issues in this winter's conditions – with fluvial (river) flooding in relatively few locations (though with a very major effect in at least one); groundwater flooding happening in many varied locations across the district and significant disruption to and flooding because of sewer problems. We took a great deal of feedback away from that meeting, some of which we will use to improve our own future response, and much of which we hope the other bodies involved will use to significantly improve their response during holiday periods.

The MP's flood meeting was an online version of the meetings that have been scheduled for some years. It was generally attended by the same agencies and groups (Gloucestershire County Council Flood Team, Environment Agency, Thames Water, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Cotswold District Council) as the previous meeting. Disappointingly Gloucestershire Highways department did not attend, which was unfortunate since some of the areas of concern relate quite specifically to highways drainage – particularly in respect of maintenance of highways infrastructure. The meeting was relatively short so there was not the opportunity to cover a significant proportion of the questions submitted in advance. The meeting did not really advance on the longer and more comprehensive meeting that took place in 2020.

There have been various other meetings held since the main flood events including further meetings with the Churn Flood Prevention Group, Siddington Flood Group, Bledington Parish Council and the Friends of Gumstool Brook. All these groups contain a wealth of technical and historic knowledge about water in their areas.

The statutory role of Cotswold District Council fits is relatively limited, mostly through the powers and responsibilities delegated down to us by Gloucestershire County Council. The strategic management of surface, groundwater and main river (fluvial) flooding is the responsibility of the Environment Agency with the County Council as the Lead Local Flood Agency (LLFA) and CDC as a body to which GCC has delegated some local powers. It is the role of the EA and LLFA to design schemes to assess risk areas and put protections in place where needed.

The data about groundwater levels, river lows and river highs show that flood risk in the Cotswolds is changing over time and will only be accentuated through the effect of climate change. The flood record shows that events previously considered to be low probability seem to be happening more often. The agencies most directly responsible need to step up and we think CDC will be able to help work with them to drive those changes forward. The regular contact we already have with towns, parishes, and residents through our regular on the ground services, particularly via Ubico, provide a route for us to help improve communication of flood risks, both to them and from them. We intend to use those communications to ensure that issues are properly recorded, raised, and addressed by whichever agency or body is responsible. New work now ongoing will help to move those activities forward in 2021/22.

(END)