

Public Questions and Responses

<p>Question from Mr David Fowles to Cllr Joe Harris</p>	<p>It was stated that many members of the public had asked Cllr Joe Harris what his total allowances are as a member of Cotswold District Council, Gloucestershire County Council and as a senior member of the Local Government Association. It was stated that according to figures, he had a total allowance of £69,000 for his positions in public services. It was also noted that Cllr Harris was the first Leader of the Council to employ a personal assistant. It was in Mr Fowles' view that it was impossible to dedicate the time necessary for the role as Leader.</p> <p>Is this the reason why your administration had only delivered for of your manifesto pledges, mismanaged the Council's finances, heaped pressure on residents by increasing Council Tax to the maximum allowable level, increased car parking charges by 60% and the Green Bin charges by 90%?</p>
<p>Response by Cllr Joe Harris</p>	<p>It was noted that all of the positions held were elected positions, the allowances were a matter of public record and employing a Personal Assistant was normal in every single Council everywhere. Cllr Harris stated he was proud of the administration's record of creating 500 new jobs through the Green Economic Growth Strategy and delivered 441 affordable houses across the district since 2019. This was compared by Cllr Harris to the record of the Conservative administration in Gloucestershire County Council who he stated had no plan for the area, had let the roads become covered in pot holes and had cut NHS services.</p>
<p>Question from Mr David Fowles to Cllr Joe Harris</p>	<p>It was stated that whilst he is normally just a member of the public, he was also representing the Cotswold Conservative Association as its Vice Chairman. It was stated that the Leader of the Council has a very close relationship with the Chief Executive after 4 years as Leader and is familiar with the Council's activities.</p> <p>It was asked whether he and Cllr Lisa Spivey was familiar with the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Publicity 2011?</p> <p>It was also asked whether Cllr Harris had made officers aware that on the front of Cotswold</p>

	<p>News and social media, the communication carries the same slogan as Liberal Democrat campaign material. Objectivity, even-handedness, and handled with care during the height of political sensitivities.</p>
<p>Response by Cllr Joe Harris</p>	<p>It was stated that both Cllr Harris and Cllr Spivey was aware of the code and it was highlighted how the communication channels used were about supporting residents with the cost of living crisis. It was also stated that by Cllr Harris that there were more editions of Cotswold News whilst Mr Fowles was a Councillor.</p> <p>In response to the second question, Cllr Harris stated that the the Cotswold Liberal Democrats slogan stated by Mr Fowles of 'Caring for our Cotswolds' was incorrect, and that it was instead 'Save our Services from Conservative Cuts'.</p>
<p>Question from Mr Rob Gibson to Cllr Mike Evey</p>	<p>In 2020 and 2021 £890,000 was paid in loans and grants to SLM. According to the agreement made, £750,000 was supposed to have been repaid in profits.</p> <p>Please could you confirm how much has been repaid, and what will happen to the residual balance should SLM not be successful with the new tender? If the money is going to be written off, then how could this be acceptable to the public who are facing a cost of living crisis, increase in Council Tax, Parking charges in 2022, and Green Waste charges.</p>
<p>Response by Cllr Mike Evey</p>	<p>In response, Cllr Evey stated that he would seek a detailed response by the Chief Finance Officer. It was stated that the agreement had been mischaracterised in the question, and that the agreement stated there would be a share payback of any profits made by SLM subsequently to the agreement being brought in. (Written Response at Annex D)</p>
<p>Question from Mr Rob Gibson to Cllr Joe Harris</p>	<p>Mr Gibson stated that the intimidation of Councillors and Officers discouraged the participation in politics. It was noted that Cotswold District Council had signed the Local Government Association's 'Debate not Hate' statement to have healthy debate, and that the Council has a code of conduct for Members. An email was sent to the Chief Executive in October 2021 regarding this matter by Mr Gibson but has not been responded to. In the</p>

	<p>last Council meeting, Mr Gibson stated that the Leader had thrown papers in the Chamber at a Member that was not condemned by anyone in the room.</p> <p>It was asked that the Leader in the public forum explain how this could be seen to be acceptable and if apology will be provided?</p>
Response by Cllr Joe Harris	<p>It was stated that the Leader didn't recognise his version of events. However, the 'Debate not Hate' initiative was recognised as important, but it was stated that Conservative Party in the Cotswolds was posting 'fake news' on its communication channels which Cllr Harris stated needed to be examined by Mr Gibson first.</p>
Question from Mrs Lynn Hilditch to Cllr Joe Harris	<p>It was stated that there had been instances where Facebook posts by Cotswold District Council had been removed. There were examples given of the change to the public speaking rules, and stating actual Councillor allowances. Mrs Hilditch believed that the Liberal Democrat manifesto pledge of transparency was being broken.</p> <p>It was asked if Cllr Harris could assure her that these type of posts would not be taken down even if they were perceived to be embarrassing or inconvenient for the administration.</p>
Response by Cllr Joe Harris	<p>Cllr Harris said that the question by Mrs Lynn Hilditch made a very serious accusation against the impartial Communications Team of Cotswold District Council. It was outlined that the Communications Officers work on the administration of social media platforms does not involve elected Members.</p>
Question from Mrs Lynn Hilditch to Cllr Andrew Doherty	<p>It was stated that there had been a big increase in dog ownership across the Cotswolds as well as an increase in visitors bringing their dogs with them. It was stated that this had led to an increase in dog fouling.</p> <p>It was asked if Cllr Doherty could confirm the status of the number of dog waste bins installed, the number of dog fouling enforcement notices issued, and the number of successful convictions?</p>
Response by Cllr Andrew Doherty	<p>Cllr Doherty stated that he would need to provide a written reply to provide accurate figures.</p>

<p>Written response by Cllr Andrew Doherty to Mrs Lynn Hilditch</p>	<p>The Council has served 1 Fixed Penalty Notice on dog fouling in the last 12 months. Dog fouling is difficult to witness and catch in the act, but through the Clean and Green Programme, school and community initiatives have taken place to educate and inform about the public health risks from dog fouling. Signs and information are provided to parishes and community groups to warn against dog fouling and patrols take place in hotspots such as playing fields and cemeteries.</p> <p>The number of new dog bins installed since April 2020 is 11 and they've replaced 14 existing dog bins that have been damaged beyond repair during that period.</p> <p>There are currently 1600 bins (both dog and litter) within the district. 26 new litter bins have also been installed during that same timeframe given the fact that litter bins can be used to dispose of dog waste. Sometimes a litter bin installation is favourable because of the dual functionality and the fact that, unlike dog bins, litter bins don't require the user to touch the bin when disposing of the waste.</p>
<p>Mrs Maggie Heaven to Cllr Juliet Layton</p>	<p>Mrs Heaven stated in the Lib Dem manifesto, there would be more staff to deal with planning enforcement cases. Mrs Heaven stated were currently 397 enforcement cases with only 1 member of staff to deal with them. It was expressed that there was concern that the core statutory functions were struggling to cope.</p> <p>It was therefore asked about how many unprocessed planning applications there were to date, and how many FOI requests are there outstanding?</p>
<p>Cllr Juliet Layton to Mrs Maggie Heaven</p>	<p>Cllr Layton stated that as there were figures requested, a written response would be provided.</p>
<p>Written response by Cllr Juliet Layton to Mrs Maggie Heaven</p>	<p>The Council currently employ 4 enforcement staff who deal with investigations into breaches of planning control. The current caseload for the team is circa 390 however this should be viewed in the round. The team has been operating a full review of all the live cases and actively seeking to reduce numbers where appropriate (in line with the Council's adopted enforcement plan), this has meant that the numbers have been reduced from nearly 700</p>

	<p>when the project commenced in September 2022 to the current figure (this is coupled with the fact that 200 new cases were opened in this time-period). This significant reduction in numbers is allowing the team to concentrate on those pressing cases and ensuring that notices where appropriate and required are able to be served in a timely manner whilst continuing to prioritise further reductions in the caseload.</p> <p>In relation to Freedom of Information requests, I can confirm that for Q4 (Jan-March 2023), the Council have received 93 FOIs, of which 71 have been responded to, 8 have missed the 20-day deadline, and 13 are pending (but still within the 20-days). There are 2 outstanding for Q3.</p>
Mrs Maggie Heaven to Cllr Jenny Forde	<p>It was noted whilst parts of the contract needed to be in private session, there was a concern that Leisure and Culture contract was being considered very close to an election. It was stated that the people of the Cotswolds believe that the current administration were financially incompetent.</p> <p>It was therefore asked whether the Council should wait until a new administration had taken over if there was a disagreement amongst Members about the contract.</p>
Cllr Jenny Forde to Mrs Maggie Heaven	Cllr Forde stated that she didn't agree with this view.
Mrs Mary Cobbett to Cllr Joe Harris	<p>It was stated that the public questions forum at Full Council was often used for political point scoring rather than for genuine questions and debate.</p> <p>It was asked whether anything could be done to control the questions presented as it was discouraging people to engage with politics?</p>
Response by Cllr Joe Harris	It was stated by Cllr Harris that many of the public speakers who were in attendance were opposition political candidates. However, it was noted that Cllr Harris did not want to curtail anyone's freedom of speech and believed that the right to ask questions should be protected.