

Member Questions for Council - 22 November 2023

Question	Response
<p>Question 1 from Councillor Jon Wareing to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation</p> <p>Could the Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation please advise the Council about the outcome of the exploratory work officers were asked to do looking at off-site pay by cash facilities for people who can't or don't wish to pay by card, by phone or by app when using our car parks?</p>	<p>Officers have made enquiries into how PayPoint may offer an opportunity for customers to pay by cash for parking in Cotswold District Council car parks.</p> <p>The initial setup fee would be £7,500 with ongoing support fees of £9,000 per annum.</p> <p>The customer would need to locate the nearest store that offers PayPoint and walk there from the place of parking. Out of the 15 charged car parks in the district, 4 outlets were identified as being within a 4-minute walk.</p> <p>No other services have been identified that could provide a cash service.</p>
<p>Question 2 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>We have seen the huge amount of building work being carried out on the Trinity Road premises to repair roof defects, install solar panels, office conversions and other improvements. Is this work on time and on budget?</p>	<p>A report is coming forward to Cabinet in January which provides an update. The agile working project set aside £675,000 for office moves, lighting upgrades, carpeting and redecoration and security changes to tenant areas. £495,000 has been committed to-date and this work is due to be completed on budget. There was £520,000 allocated for repairs to the roofs. Whilst the initial quotes received were within budget, the scope of the work has been extended as invasive testing revealed that the substructure was saturated and therefore flat roofs would need to be stripped and insulation and boarding replaced rather than just re-covered. In addition the opportunity has been taken to undertake replacement of valleys (wide gutters between roofs) as it is more cost effective while other roofing repairs are ongoing. Work is ongoing but the estimated cost is now £606,364.</p> <p>Work was originally due to complete in July 2023. However, the initial tender process for roof repairs failed to generate any quotations. There was therefore a delay whilst interest in the work was generated and contractors were again invited to submit quotes. Delays have pushed the work into the</p>

	Autumn period which causes further delays due to weather conditions, however work is due to complete by the end of January.
<p>Question 3 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Joe Harris</p> <p>Could you confirm the cost of producing the October 2023 “Cotswold News”, including design, print and distribution via Royal Mail?</p> <p>Please also confirm ALL officer time spent in preparing this publication?</p>	<p>The total cost of design, print and distribution of Cotswold News in October 2023 was £15, 818.</p> <p>We have not kept detailed records of time spent working on Cotswold News, however, we estimate a total of 50-70 hours worth of work across the Communications and Marketing Team. There will also be time spent by other officers to review content, supply information and provide other required support.</p>
<p>Question 4 from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation</p> <p>On the 5th November this Council announced that it will be conducting a full study and review of its current car parks, working with local communities and parish councils to understand the current needs in each area. It also announced that it will look at what improvements car parks may need such as EV chargers.</p> <p>So far, the Town and Parish Councils in my ward are reporting that the community reach out from CDC has been limited to one generic email! How does the portfolio holder intend to engage on such an important and fundamental part of Town and Parish life?</p> <p>‘Working together’ is not done by a circular email or would anything more be considered too expensive given this councils current budgetary pressures?</p>	<p>The Council intends to engage with Town and Parish Councils, and all interested stakeholders through focused meeting sessions held in the community to listen to feedback and concerns.</p> <p>Furthermore, we will be running online surveys which will be promoted in all our car park locations and through our media channels. This will provide an opportunity for all customers and stakeholders that have an interest in shaping the future car parking strategy to share with us their feedback and concerns.</p>

Question 5 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

Cherwell District Council provides support for people needing to rent in the Private Rental Sector (PRS) who have insufficient savings to provide a deposit, are refugees or involved with the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Primarily they provide a deposit bond in place of a cash deposit, as well as other help for both the potential tenant and landlord, including access to grant funding for property improvements of up to £15,000 (Landlord Home Improvement Grant).

Has CDC considered implementing a similar scheme to help those who are on the waiting list for social and affordable housing find suitable, secure accommodation more quickly?

Cotswold District Council is allocated an annual Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) plus on occasion, other short term top ups allocated throughout the year for specific purposes such as Winter pressures. For 2023/24 Cotswold DC also received a large top up to address additional pressures from the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

The reports outlining the grants and the planned expenditure can be found here:

<https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/documents/s6764/Cotswold%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Grant%202023-2025%20Proposed%20Spending.pdf>

<https://meetings.cotswold.gov.uk/documents/s7493/CDC%20Planned%20Expenditure%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Grant%20Top%20Up%20Ukraine.pdf>

Part of the planned spending of the general HPG is to provide Rent in Advance and Deposits for those who the council has an assessed housing duty to assist. The Housing Team may also provide, amongst other things, necessary white goods or furniture to those who are homeless and have no possessions from a previous tenancy. The Housing Team will also consider on a case-by-case basis using the HPG for any measure providing that it prevents homelessness or assists with securing alternative accommodation to avoid a household becoming homeless.

It is necessary to limit the funds to those with housing duties as the HPG is finite so must be directed at those with the greatest need.

Households from the Homes for Ukraine scheme in need of financial support to set up a tenancy can also access a countywide fund as well as the Cotswold top up grant. The Housing Team work in close partnership with the County to ensure that each fund is used for its intended purpose and is maximised to help as many people as possible.

The Council has offered a 'paper' bond scheme in the past whereby the

	<p>council would guarantee to cover costs incurred through arrears or damage at the end of a tenancy up to an agreed amount, however this was discontinued around 5 years ago for multiple reasons. The ‘paper’ bond can remain outstanding for many years until a tenancy ends and therefore a landlord may make a claim on the bond years after it is issued. This left the council exposed to tens of thousands of potential claims that cannot be predicted and are therefore difficult to budget for. There is also very little chance of recovering any bonds paid to landlords as these were being given to the most vulnerable of our clients and who have the least amount of spare money to repay such a debt.</p> <p>The HPG conditions have also changed in recent years in that DLUHC expect the grants to be spent within the budget year and they cannot be carried over into the next. Therefore, any payments made from the HPG to the most vulnerable of our clients are now given as one-off grants with no expectation of repayment.</p>
<p>Question 6 from Councillor Len Wilkins to Councillor Mike McKeown, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Sustainability</p> <p>At the Audit Committee meeting on 18th October, Internal Audit reported a key finding that climate change operations are not sufficiently embedded in the organisation. In particular, it found that 75% of survey respondents did not have any Climate Change key performance indicators to track operational work being done; 88% of officers were not actively tracking their Carbon Footprint within their service area and only 50% of respondents said they had resources to actively work towards their Climate Change commitments. There are KPIs shown in the last two Overview and Scrutiny minutes, so when will KPI’s appear for Climate Change so we can monitor progress being made in this vital area?</p>	<p>Thank you, Councillor Wilkins, for raising this crucial issue. Climate change is a matter I feel deeply passionate about, and its impacts are not just a distant threat but a present reality. It’s imperative that we acknowledge and address these challenges head-on, both within our organisation and beyond.</p> <p>Regarding the key findings from the audit committee, I want to clarify some points. The percentages cited, while concerning, stem from a low response rate to the survey, with only 27 officers participating. For example, the 75% who reportedly did not have climate change KPIs actually represents just 6 officers. Similarly, the 88% not tracking their carbon footprint equates to 7 respondents.</p> <p>This limited participation does not provide a comprehensive view of our organisation’s engagement with climate change. We are addressing this by redesigning the questionnaire for greater uptake and plan to relaunch it in 2024. This will offer a more accurate reflection of our efforts and areas needing improvement.</p> <p>Furthermore, the survey did not cover significant climate change activities</p>

	<p>already underway, such as our work on the Local Plan and the Carbon Literacy training rolled out since July and the recent decision to install solar on council buildings and the successful launch of the Cotswold Solar initiative with Make My House Green.</p> <p>Acknowledging the need for improvement, we're prioritising the creation of a corporate plan KPIs and myself and Charlie Jackson are looking to engage more widely with staff and the cabinet by establishing a new Climate Board starting in the New Year. The aim of the board will be to ensure strong embedding and action to ensure climate change is at the heart of all our operations and we are green to the core.</p> <p>Regarding national climate policy, the government's recent cynical reversal of key green initiatives is deeply concerning. These decisions, widely criticized, not only undermine the UK's climate leadership but also pose substantial risks to our economy and prospects for inward investment.</p> <p>Rolling back these policies will harm the UK's economy by increasing reliance on fossil fuels, leading to higher long-term costs and greater exposure to volatile global energy markets and Putin's War, increases household expenses and diminishes savings from transitioning to energy-efficient technologies, while harming people's health due to pollution. The UK risks missing out on the growing global market for green technology and sustainable infrastructure, sectors that are pivotal for future economic growth.</p> <p>These developments emphasize the critical importance of our local efforts and the need for robust, consistent leadership at all levels to confront the climate emergency. It's a stark reminder that effective climate action is not only an environmental necessity but also a key driver of economic stability and growth.</p>
<p>Question 7 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture</p> <p>Since Freedom Leisure won the contract to manage CDC's leisure and</p>	<p>The transition from one Leisure Operator to another at the end of a Contract Term is a complex process with a range of items and matters that need to be put into place. The overarching aim is to ensure that the customer experience remains seamless whilst 'behind the scenes' all of the</p>

museum services, it is noticeable that the built fabric and level of service has deteriorated. As a season ticket member, I receive regular comments from other users. Could the portfolio holder confirm what plans are in place to monitor customer satisfaction levels?

systems, processes, data, ITC software and hardware, etc. are migrated.

Unfortunately, there were some technical issues that occurred in the mobilisation phase (since August 1st). These included a staff error which led to a loss of pool water, some items of plant being identified as below the expected standard on takeover, and rainwater ingress which led to an electrical fault. Whilst these were managed and responded to well by Freedom Leisure they were unexpected which led to short periods of downtime for the facilities, including pool closures.

Whilst the intended mobilisation phase of three months has taken slightly longer, Freedom Leisure has worked very hard alongside council officers to address the unexpected problems, most of which were legacy issues, as well as customer concerns effectively and in a timely manner. This has meant a slight delay in making the planned improvements. The transition is now on schedule and business as usual as well as further improvements to the services and customer experience is expected to continue.

As an example of Freedom Leisure's commitment to making improvements in the facilities, they have reported that since 1st August 2023 they have spent approximately £24,000 on building maintenance. This demonstrates that some areas were in need of investment – and that under our new partnership agreement Freedom Leisure are committed to take on these challenges, which will lead to significant improvements in the longer term.

Customer Satisfaction is a key factor in delivering the Leisure service, this is an area in which Freedom Leisure have a strong track record. There are a number of reporting mechanisms that fall under the Leisure Contract to ensure that Customer Satisfaction is delivered. Listed below is an example of the range of measures that will be used for this:-

- Quest (a nationally recognised Quality Assurance Scheme for the Leisure sector) will be introduced in 2024. This will include 'Mystery Visits' and face to face interviews and site management reviews from industry qualified assessors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An NPS Survey (which measures customer experience and loyalty) will be undertaken early in 2024 to ascertain the current performance and to form a benchmark through the rest of the Contract • Freedom Leisure conduct internal audits from experts within their own estate to continually monitor service performance in fields such as H&S, Technical Operations, Energy Management, etc. <p>Regular meetings are now scheduled (Monthly, Quarterly, Annually) between various stakeholder representatives and the Freedom Leisure colleagues to ensure continued monitoring takes place of each of the service areas. Customer Feedback is also important and there is a trackable 'Customer Comment' scheme in place. This is in the form of both physical media and virtual. Whilst the number of actual reports received since August 1st 2023 are relatively low, we can see from the data held that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89% of enquiries were resolved within 24 hours • 11% of enquiries were resolved within 7 days • There is a downward trend in the number of comments being received at the sites. <p>In November 2023 Freedom Leisure have also introduced 'Meet the Manager' sessions for sites. Feedback from these sessions will be used to inform each Centres planning/improvement actions. The response from customers to the initial sessions has been positive.</p>
<p>Question 8 from Councillor Chris Twells to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Members will have noted that the 2023/24 pay award for local government</p>	<p>Members' Allowances for 2023/24 will remain unchanged in line with the decision taken by Members at the Annual Council to implement a freeze in allowances for 2023/24 at their 2022/23 level.</p> <p>23 councillors including members of the Liberal Democrat and Green Groups</p>

<p>staff in England has now been agreed with the trade unions. Can the Deputy Leader now provide us with a figure for increased councillor allowances, as voted for by Liberal Democrats and Cllr Ind at Annual Council on 24 May?</p>	<p>together with Councillor Ind supported this resolution. Five members from the Conservative and Green Groups opposed the resolution while five Conservative Group members abstained with Councillor Twells absent.</p>
<p>Question 9 from Councillor Chris Twells to Councillor Mike Every, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>What will be the total cost to council taxpayers for the by-election in the Lechlade, Kempsford and Fairford South Ward scheduled for Thursday 14 December?</p>	<p>The estimated cost of the by-election is around £9,000, but the final figure will not be known until all the invoices have been received. The by-election in February 2022 in the other two-member ward, Campden & Vale, cost £8,500.</p>