

Questions submitted to Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the Council from Cllr Chris Twells

I - To the Leader

A resident of Tetbury Upton, Claire Jefferies, and other volunteers do fantastic work at the Goods Shed in Tetbury

Claire emailed me during the election campaign and said: "[I have invited the Leader] to come and see the excellent work undertaken with zero funding. This was prompted after the generous donation made by CDC to The Barn Theatre for their cinema equipment to show what the people of Tetbury have done without the same level of support. Alas, Cllr Harris directed me to his assistant who never came back with a proposed date, despite my prompting. I even offered free coffee and cake from the Whistle Stop Cafe."

Please could the Leader commit to visiting the Goods Shed with me before the end of July 2023 to meet Claire and the other volunteers and identify what support they would like from the District Council? We will, of course, pay full price for any refreshment.

Response from Cllr Joe Harris, The Leader of the Council

I'd like to thank Cllr Twells for bringing this to my attention.

I'd be more than happy to meet with Claire and Cllr Twells to look at the Goods Shed in Tetbury and will look to bring Cllr Hodgkinson too as our new Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture.

Please accept my apologies that a date hasn't been arranged to date. The initial request and follow up email was sent before my current executive assistant started in post and during a period when I was without administrative support. As a result the request was missed.

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Cotswold District Council currently operates under the Leader and Cabinet system. This system has been described by campaigners as "undemocratic, leading to bad decisions and a focus on divisive party politics instead of doing the best for the District." The eight councillors who actually have power to make most decisions (whether Liberal Democrat or Conservative in recent years) are unrepresentative of the District and are indebted to the Leader for their positions and allowances. All but one of the current Cabinet have a Cirencester postcode. The remaining 26 councillors are locked out of the decision-making process.

Bristol has recently opted to change to a committee system. The Localism Act 2011 allows for 5% of residents in the District to trigger a governance referendum and the cross-party campaigning group 'Our Cotswolds' has started to collect signatures. If successful, a referendum could be held in May 2024 alongside the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and a committee system would be in place by May 2025. However, councils have the option to change without holding a referendum.

Will the Leader meet with 'Our Cotswolds' and representatives from the Green, Conservative and Independent Groups to discuss changing to the modern committee system without the delay and expense of a referendum?

Response from Cllr Joe Harris, The Leader of the Council

In the 2019 Liberal Democrat manifesto for Cotswold District Council, we committed to reviewing the decision-making structures of the Council.

That review took place in 2021/22 under a brief from the Constitution Working Group. It was carried out by a Models of Governance Working Group consisting of three members – Cllr Mike Evemy (chair), Cllr Patrick Coleman and former councillor Stephen Andrews – together with relevant officers. They investigated the alternatives available and met with officers and members to understand how their decision-making structures worked. The final report of that Group was presented to the Constitution Working Group on 4 May 2022 and can be found [here](#).

The Group considered the alternative decision-making structures available to the Council and recommended that the Council should continue with the Leader, Cabinet and Scrutiny Model. It also recommended that changes should be made to the Cabinet Member Individual Decision-Maker meetings to improve transparency.

Both of those recommendations were agreed by the Constitution Working Group with the changes to Individual Decision-Maker meetings agreed by Council on [18th January 2023](#) and subsequently implemented.

I don't accept the description of the Council's decision-making structure as 'undemocratic'. Nor do I accept that the Cabinet is unrepresentative – its members are chosen from the majority group on the Council I lead - or that where Cabinet members live determines how they make decisions on behalf of residents across the District. There are ways for members to get involved in the decision-making process of the Council whether they are from the majority Liberal Democrat Group or not.

I have not previously heard of a group called 'Our Cotswolds' but would be happy to receive further information from them on their aims and objectives.

I am happy to discuss the decision-making structure of the Council with you and fellow Group Leaders. The decision we took to retain the Leader, Cabinet and Scrutiny model was with the support of both the Conservative members of the Constitution Working Group and Councillor Ind as well as the Liberal Democrat members of the Group.