

Member Questions for Council - 20 September 2023

Question	Response
<p>Question 1 from Councillor Tom Stowe to Councillor Mike McKeown, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Sustainability</p> <p>In December last year, your predecessor, Cllr Coxcoon, stated her position that tourists travelling to the Cotswolds via air travel should be deterred. Please could you confirm the Cabinet's current position on promoting the Cotswolds as a place to visit for air travellers?</p>	<p>We welcome visitors to the Cotswolds from all over the world and would ask them and indeed support them, where possible, to travel here in the most sustainable way possible.</p> <p>A couple of points on how we support sustainable visitor travel:</p> <p>The District Council plays a key role in Cotswolds Tourism Destination Management Organisation and the newly formed Cotswolds Plus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). The Destination Management Plan identifies sustainability as a priority and highlights an objective to: "To increase usage of sustainable transport by visitors when travelling to and around the Cotswolds". Efforts are made to specifically target operators with an active & sustainable travel element.</p> <p>I'm currently working with officers to make the Cotswolds a better place to visit in an electric vehicle, by accelerating both our own and partners installation of electric vehicle chargers. We've all been frustrated by the lack of progress on the lock of progress when it comes to electric vehicle charging points and I hope to bring positive news on this soon.</p> <p>I'd also like to highlight this administration's work on green economic growth means that we now host ZeroAvia here in the Cotswolds, who are one of the companies that is leading the transition to sustainable aviation.</p>

Question 2 from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services

CDC recently issued a Press Release about the planning department including new information about recruitment.

How many vacancies are there currently and will that mean that the planning department will be running at full capacity for the foreseeable future?

Our Cotswold District Planning team has a team of 13 FTEs assessing planning applications. Following a period of relative stability we now have 4 vacancies within the team. Reasons for leaving include family commitments, moving into the private sector, change in career and taking time out for travelling.

We are reviewing how best to fill these vacancies in order to ensure we're working as smartly and efficiently as possible, taking the opportunity to review any possibilities for cost savings whilst ensuring we don't compromise on good service and performance. We will utilise temporary resource if we feel more time is needed to review these considerations.

It's worth noting that there is a national shortage of planners and after 10 years of austerity councils struggle to compete with the private sector when it comes to terms and conditions that we can offer current and prospective employees.

With this in mind and this administration's ambition to enhance planning services, whilst balancing required cost savings, a holistic resource review is underway and may result in further changes in team structure.

Question 3 from Councillor Tom Stowe to Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture

Please could you confirm the total costs to CDC of hosting the upcoming Mr Motivator event on Sunday 1st October?

The total estimated cost of the event is £3800. The exact figure will be available after the event. There is no direct cost to Cotswold District Council for the event.

It is funded through an external grant received from NHS Gloucestershire to get people more active, promote healthy lifestyles and tackle health inequalities. This therefore represents an investment in the wellbeing of our residents and preventative activity such as this significantly reduces the future burden on the NHS which is a priority for our administration.

This event is part of the wider Active Cotswold programme, which aims to develop an improved leisure offer. Apart from improvements to the leisure centres and facility-based offers, Active Cotswold specifically aims to co-create more community based, affordable,

	<p>sustainable, and inclusive physical activity opportunities that are accessible to people where they live.</p> <p>Examples of initiatives that have already been implemented are Community Fit Kits, a new inclusive Outdoor Movement Class and free access to the Mr Motivator Motivation Club which is an online offer.</p> <p>I look forward to Councillor Stowe attending the event if he can.</p>
<p>Question 4 from Councillor Len Wilkins to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>There have been some recent high profile cyber security attacks on several private and public organisations. This threat is likely to continue to grow over the coming years. To counter this growing threat it's vital that organisations have a policy of continuous improvement in cyber security practice to support the security, resilience and integrity of digital services, data and systems. Does the council have a formal published cyber-security policy?"</p>	<p>We have made significant investments in Cyber Security. Cyber Security is now embedded in every technology and data decision across the Council.</p> <p>In early 2022, in the wake of the Gloucester City Council Cyber incident, a gap analysis was conducted comparing the Councils security capabilities with information provided by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). Whilst the analysis concluded our systems would have detected an attack with similar traits to the Gloucester City incident, other attack pathways were identified. The analysis made a series of recommendations which were given a high priority and accepted. The recommendations included additional funding for security tools to enhance threat visibility and protection as well as investment in staff and professional training.</p> <p>Through this investment, supplemented with additional Local Government Association (LGA) funding, the 4 Councils now employ 3 staff dedicated to Cyber Security that form a Cyber Team within the shared ICT team. In total, across our ICT team we now employ 5 staff who hold cyber certifications. These certifications require continuous, professional development (CPD), ensuring the staff's skills and knowledge are up to date.</p> <p>Across the ICT partnership our systems ingest over 40 million security logs per day. Our Cyber Team use Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning to reduce this to an average of 25 incidents per day. Each incident is reviewed by the Team and the appropriate action taken.</p>

	<p>We accept that we cannot stand still. Our technical security systems continue to evolve and adapt as new threats emerge. Our ICT staff receive regular cyber intelligence from the NCSC as well as leading private sector security organisations. As an aside, security information sharing between our neighbouring Councils in Gloucestershire has significantly improved over the past two years.</p> <p>We do not publish a formal policy that lists the current security tools and deterrents deployed as this would be the equivalent of providing a burglar with the blueprints to our buildings.</p> <p>To provide further detail, a confidential Councillor Cyber Briefing has been arranged for 14th November 2023, which I would encourage you all to attend. This briefing will include a live demo of some of the Councils security capabilities. It will also include details of enhancements being deployed in the current financial year.</p> <p>It would be appreciated if all members could complete their Cyber Security training as soon as possible. The training is an NCSC accredited course specifically designed for Councillors. A similar course is being rolled out to all Officers across both Publica, Ubico and the Councils.</p>
<p>Question 5 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture</p> <p>A local resident from the farming community raised concerns with me regarding the future of the very important collection of old agricultural equipment currently displayed at the Old Prison, Northleach. I followed this up and</p>	<p>Thank you for your question and for taking the time to liaise with the Museum and Friends of the Cotswolds on the wide and varied collection that we have including the agricultural equipment. As you may be aware, there is an agreement in place between the Council and the Friends regarding the collection. We had a productive meeting in the last few days with the Friends which included some of the points and observations you have made in your question.</p> <p>We discussed with the Friends of the Cotswolds how we can make the displays more</p>

<p>subsequently had a meeting with Emma Stuart of the Corinium Museum together with Dr Alison Grierson-Brooks at the Old Prison and also met three of the volunteers who work on the conservation of the objects. As I understand it the collection is owned by the Corinium Museum which in turned is owned by Cotswold District Council. Many of the pieces in the collection are 'accessional' and were accepted by the Government in lieu of death duties so cannot be sold. Friends of the Cotswolds bought the Old Prison from CDC in 2012-2013 and agreed to house and maintain the collection there. A review of the display with a condition report was due to have been carried out in July 2022 but was never done.</p> <p>What are the plans for the future of this historic collection of farm equipment which I feel should be given greater care and more publicity so that more people now as well as future generations can learn about farming methods before the advent of modern machinery and enjoy seeing these fascinating objects?</p>	<p>prominent and accessible to ensure these fascinating objects are cared for, conserved and displayed so they receive the attention they deserve.</p> <p>We will continue to work closely with our stakeholders to make improvements to the display of old agricultural equipment including funding new information and interpretation boards and obtaining an up-to-date condition survey of all the historic and culturally significant artefacts that are in the collection at the Old Prison, Northleach.</p>
<p>Question 6 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>I read the latest Ubico newsletter with interest, particularly regarding the visit to Oak Quarry Household Recycling Centre in Coleford by students from the Heart of the Forest Special School. I am frequently asked questions regarding recycling by residents – where it goes, how it is organised</p>	<p>Ubico manages the household waste recycling centres on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) who are the Waste Disposal Authority. Oak Quarry Household Recycling Centre is in the Forest of Dean district. Information about where waste is sent by GCC is on their website here - https://www.gloucestershirerecycles.com/recycling-at-home/where-are-gloucestershires-materials-recycled/county/asbestos/#main</p> <p>Councillor Lynden Stowe, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member - Finance and Change at GCC has been asked to provide details to Councillor Blomefield of the proceeds from waste</p>

<p>and the proceeds from it. Could a visit to this recycling facility for all interested District Councillors be arranged so that we could see for ourselves how this important service is managed by Ubico</p>	<p>materials.</p> <p>Cotswold District Council provides a domestic kerbside service to all residents of the district and details of where recycling materials are taken are on the Council's website here - https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/bins-and-recycling/what-happens-to-your-recycling/</p> <p>I have asked Officers to arrange a visit for Members to a Household Recycling Centre and I know they have already been in contact with Councillor Blomefield about this.</p>
<p>Question 7 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Mike Evely, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Given the national concern over public buildings constructed using RAAC concrete, could the leader confirm that no buildings owned by CDC were constructed using this material.</p> <p>If CDC does not have this information, will the leader confirm what plans he has to reassure members of the public that our buildings are safe?</p>	<p>I am responding to your question as a portfolio holder for assets. As soon as the issue with RAAC became widely known, the Leader asked officers to carry out a review of the Council's buildings. Here is a summary of the key findings from that review:</p> <p>Corporate buildings: Our corporate buildings (Trinity Road and Moreton Area Centre) are not affected by RAAC.</p> <p>Leisure Centres: Our leisure centres are not at risk due to more recent construction.</p> <p>Commercial Buildings: Initial feedback indicates there's a low risk in our commercial buildings due to age and construction method.</p> <p>Properties Constructed Between 1950 and 1990 Further review of properties constructed between 1950 and 1990 is underway to ensure nothing is missed.</p>

	<p>I will ensure Members are advised if further investigations identify any issues regarding RAAC in our buildings. In addition, the Leader has asked housing associations with homes in the District to tell the Council if any of their housing stock is affected and will update Members following receipt of their replies.</p>
<p>Question 8 from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Historically all Council meetings were held during the working day. When the Liberal Democrats took power in 2019, the times of meetings were reviewed and changed so that a number of meetings now take place in the evenings.</p> <p>This change was designed to allow elected members who worked to attend meetings as well as giving members of the public more flexibility.</p> <p>Since 2019 we have been through Covid, introduced agile working for staff and held local elections resulting in a large number of newly elected members who in many instances have to attend Parish Council meetings and other meetings in the evenings.</p> <p>We have experienced many instances where staff are not available in the evenings and members have meeting clashes and conflict.</p> <p>I believe the schedule of meeting times doesn't work and</p>	<p>I do not recognise the statement that there have been many instances where staff have not been available to attend evening meetings. Speaking to both our Chief Executive and the Managing Director of Publica they haven't raised any concerns in this respect on behalf of staff.</p> <p>The current start times for committee meetings were agreed by Council in November 2022.</p> <p>A draft programme of meetings for 2024/25 will be coming forwards to the next meeting of Council, which will provide Members with an opportunity to propose alternative start times.</p> <p>It's worth noting that most councils hold the majority of their formal meetings in the evening to make it easier for working age people to attend and that this is considered best practice in the local government sector.</p>

<p>needs to be changed as a priority.</p> <p>Please could the portfolio holder undertake a review?</p>	
<p>Question 9 from Councillor Nikki Ind to Councillor Mike McKeown, Cabinet Member Climate Change and Sustainability</p> <p>Further to the recent announcement that the first funding for rural electric buses via the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas programme is being made available to all local authorities in England outside of London, can you please confirm that Cotswold District Council is working with Gloucestershire County Council to apply for this funding to provide rural transport, which is lacking in the District and particularly in my area in the south – which missed out on the Robin ‘on demand’ trial currently being run in the north of the District.</p>	<p>I am certainly keen to encourage and support the transition from fossil fuel to zero emissions bus services and improve public transport access in the Cotswolds and will seek to work with GCC to ensure the Cotswolds is represented on this.</p> <p>I understand the Department for Transport (DfT) launched the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) 2 fund on 8 September 2023 and it has requested that local highways authorities submit notifications of intention by 20 October 2023. The deadline for submitting a bid is 15 December 2023. At the time of writing Gloucestershire County Council has not yet considered what a potential bid could look like and whether it will submit a bid.</p> <p>Gloucestershire County Council have explained that like ZEBRA 1, applicants can bid for up to 75% of the cost difference between a zero-emission bus and a standard conventional diesel bus and up to 75% of capital expenditure incurred for infrastructure. It appears an element of the fund will be ring-fenced for rural areas. DfT ZEBRA 2 guidance is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-zero-emission-bus-funding-zebra-2/apply-for-zero-emission-bus-funding-zebra-2.</p> <p>It should be noted that the “Robin” was funded via the Rural Mobility Fund not ZEBRA 1. GCC was not able to bid for ZEBRA 1 funding as it could not raise the local matched funding contribution needed. Again ZEBRA 2 bid depends on whether it can find a bus operator to work with who is also willing to invest and contribute financially. GCC are contacting operators this week to see who may be interested.</p>

Question 10 from Councillor Dilys Neill to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

(This question was received past the deadline for a guaranteed response in advance of the meeting of Friday 8th September. It was therefore not published on the main agenda)

What are the council's policies for bringing empty properties back into use? Do you know how many empty properties there are in Cotswold District and how many have been brought back into use, particularly for accommodation in the last year?

The council is committed to bringing as many empty properties back into use as possible and our current strategy is outlined in the Long Term Empty Homes Strategy 2019 - 2024. You can find a link to this on the council's website - [link to Long Term Empty Homes Strategy](#)

As at the end of July 2023 there were 846 long term empty homes on the register.

236 properties have been removed from the Long Term Empty register during this financial year.

We'll shortly begin work on the next iteration of the Long Term Empty Homes strategy and I'd appreciate Cllr Neill's input as I know Stow, Mangersbury and the Swells suffer because of long term empty properties.