

Member Questions for Council – 24 January 2024

Question	Response
<p data-bbox="103 357 992 464">Question 1 from Councillor Len Wilkins to Councillor Mike McKeown, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Sustainability</p> <p data-bbox="103 501 1043 683">How many of the planned EV charging points have Cotswold District Council now installed across the district? What impact have inflationary pressures, energy costs and other economic factors had on the business case, first put to Cabinet in March 2022, for the installation of these EV chargers?</p>	<p data-bbox="1111 357 1973 392">As an EV driver myself this is a subject near and dear to my heart!</p> <p data-bbox="1111 427 2130 831">The first phase of planned EV installations included replacement of old EVCP units at Beeches car park, Cirencester and Old Market Way car park, Moreton in Marsh. These were completed in 2022. New units were also planned for Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water and Trinity Road, Cirencester. Each site will have 4 charging units giving the ability to charge 8 vehicles at one time. The below ground civil engineering works to install cabling for the EVCPs at Rissington Road was undertaken last year as part of the wider car park improvement works. The below ground cabling was installed at Trinity Road in December. For both these projects we are now waiting on a connection date from SSEN. Overall, we are disappointed in the delays due to the contractor, Connected Kerb.</p> <p data-bbox="1111 871 2107 978">We are also progressing grant applications to seek funding for additional car park sites to support our plans to provide a wider charging infrastructure across the Cotswolds and encourage electric vehicle ownership.</p> <p data-bbox="1111 1018 2119 1158">The replacement units were installed as per quoted prices in 2022. The new units at Rissington Road and Trinity Road have actually reduced in cost since the original Cabinet report was considered as a new supplier was appointed who provided a better price.</p> <p data-bbox="1111 1198 2130 1339">Energy costs have an impact on the price charged to the customer, as the Council needs to pass on rising electricity costs. A model for the fee calculation was agreed by Cabinet which means the price to the customer can be changed to reflect changes in the costs of providing the service.</p>

<p>Question 2 from Councillor Tom Stowe to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Please could you confirm the current expected lead time for the repair or replacement of street signs?</p>	<p>Pride in Place is really important to this administration and therefore we have been replacing street signs that are in a poor condition. We are planning a further tranche of replacements but need to ensure we balance the benefits these street sign improvements provide with the costs, when we are faced with managing a challenging budget position. We are in the process of agreeing which street signs will be prioritised in the next round of replacements and I will then provide an update on timescales for this work.</p>
<p>Question 3 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>There is a great deal of concern across the Cotswold District about the ever-increasing number of second homes and properties which are let out as holiday homes both of which decrease the supply of housing available for would be residents. The ONS states that 8% of properties in the Cotswolds are vacant.</p> <p>An additional issue is holiday homes which are registered as businesses which do not have to pay council tax and fall below the threshold for paying business rates and yet their domestic bins are collected along with everyone else's.</p> <p>The popularity of the Cotswolds as a place to have a weekend retreat or its attraction as a tourist destination is mirrored in places such as the Lake District and whilst it brings prosperity, which is valuable to the local economy, it would be good to have greater control of these type of tenures and also capture more financial benefit for the District Council.</p> <p>As a start, what avenues has this Council explored to advise property owners who rent out properties as holiday homes registered as a business that they should pay a commercial waste charge as happens in Salcombe; doubling council tax on second homes as is proposed in Whitby and Swanage and also a doubling of council tax on properties which have been vacant over a year?</p>	<p>A project to review holiday homes which are registered for non-domestic rates and receive a domestic waste collection service has been commissioned as part of the Environmental Services Innovation Programme (ESIP). A discovery to assess the number of business premises and scale will start in April and is scheduled to be completed in June. Options will then be presented to Members for consideration.</p> <p>The Government reviewed the eligibility criteria for second homes that have been subject to Business Rates rather than Council Tax. From April 2023, second homeowners have to prove holiday lets are being rented out for a minimum of 70 days a year to access small business rates relief, where they meet the criteria. Holiday let owners will have to provide evidence such as the website or brochure used to advertise the property, letting details and receipts. Properties will also have to be available to be rented out for 140 days a year to qualify for this relief.</p> <p>As far as Council Tax is concerned, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, passed into law in October 2023, would allow Councils to charge a council tax premium on second homes of up to an additional 100%, and also allows a premium to be charged on homes that remain empty after one year (rather than the current minimum two-year period).</p> <p>The Council would need to provide 12 month's notice of its intention to charge a premium on second homes. A report will come forward to Cabinet and Council in March 2024 outlining the administration's proposals on Council Tax premiums, although we are still waiting for detailed guidance</p>

	<p>from the Government on exactly which properties would be eligible.</p> <p>I understand that a number of the Gloucestershire Districts have indicated they intend to charge a premium on second homes from April 2025.</p>
<p>*Question 4 from Councillor Chris Twells to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>It is reported that fraud and the misuse of public money cost taxpayers in the Cotswold District tens of thousands of pounds every year.</p> <p>Will the Deputy Leader confirm the number of investigations begun by the Counter Fraud & Enforcement Unit since 31 December 2022, broken down in terms of investigations into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Members of the District Councilb) Members of Town or Parish Councilsc) Council employees, including contractors and agency staffd) All other investigations. <p><i>*Question received after publication of the agenda and for the deadline for a guaranteed written response under Rule 11.10 of the Council Procedure Rules</i></p>	<p>This information is all available in the public domain.</p> <p>The reports to Audit and Governance Committee give a clear breakdown in relation to the number of cases, referrals and outcomes.</p> <p>For the period in question please refer to reports presented on 27 April 2023 and 30 November 2023.</p>

***Question 5 from Councillor Chris Twells to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation**

Residents of West Street and Cottons Lane in Tetbury regularly raise the concern that, despite having purchased annual parking permits, they are often unable to park in West Street car park.

Will the Cabinet Member accept my invitation to visit Tetbury to speak to residents about how we balance the needs of visitors and residents in car parks such as West Street? Any visit would, of course, have to be after the triple Town Council by-election on Super Thursday (15 February).

****Question received after publication of the agenda and the deadline for a guaranteed written response under Rule 11.10 of the Council Procedure Rules***

Response to follow