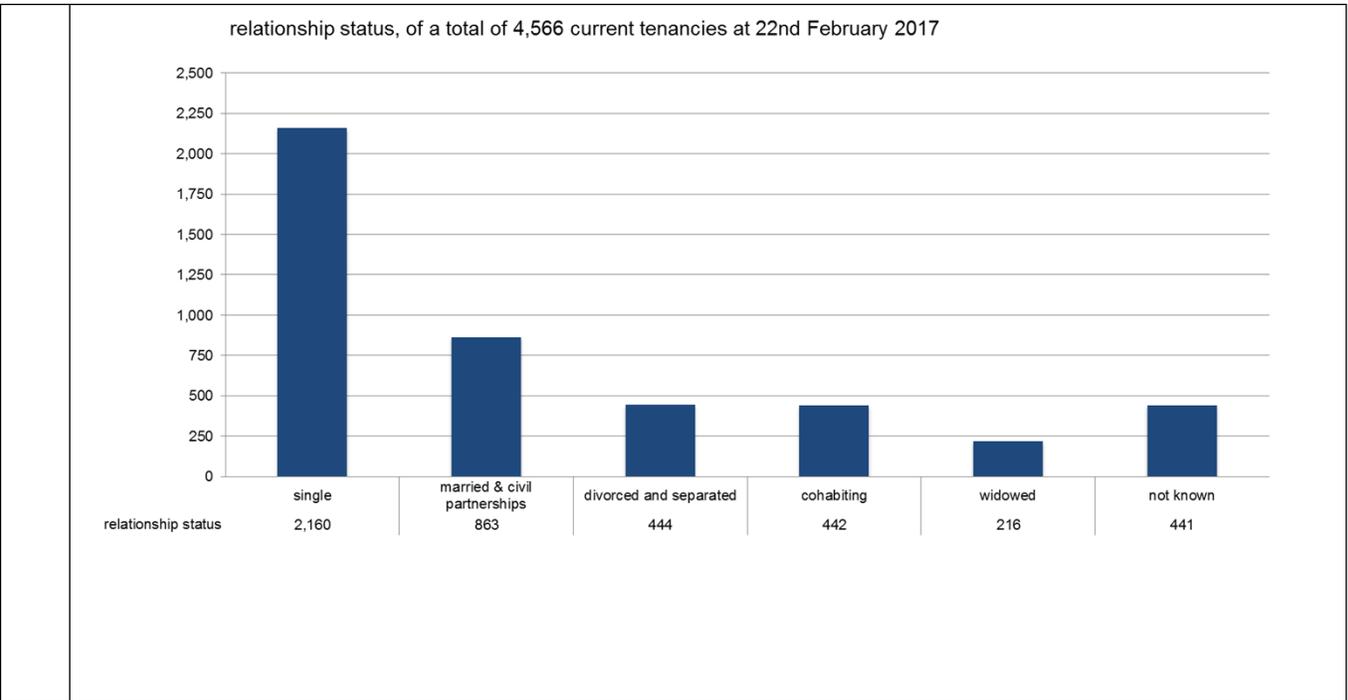


Council – 24 February 2017

Member Questions (7)

1.	Question from Councillor Peter Jeffries to Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, Councillor Tim Harman
	Following the submission of the 1000 signature petition in October 2016 from the residents of Springbank and the subsequent council debate, the Overview & Scrutiny committee were asked to review bus services in general and how they could be better provided in Cheltenham. How is this work progressing, have any actions or recommendations been proposed or agreed?
	Response from the Chair of O&S
	<p>At its meeting on the 17 October 2016, Council considered a petition regarding changes, by Stagecoach, to the C Service; namely the removal of the service to Springbank Way in its entirety. During the debate it was decided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider bus services in general and how they could be better delivered in Cheltenham.</p> <p>Rupert Cox, Managing Director for Stagecoach (West), attended the 28 November 2016 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He gave a presentation which was followed by a question and answer session with members (draft minutes are attached).</p> <p>Some of the key points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The biggest challenge facing Stagecoach was congestion. The knock on impact of a journey taking 5-10 minutes longer than it should ultimately resulted in a journey not operating, currently measured at 0.5% of journeys. Bus priority measures would not only allow bus journeys to be speeded up but they would also be more predictable as the bus would journey unhindered. Tewkesbury Road in particular would benefit from a bus lane, and whilst unpopular with the public, the business case for the A40 scheme had merit.• North West Cheltenham was, in Stagecoach's view, a good area for development as there was potential to add a park and ride service. This would allow for existing services to be made more frequent and given the size of the site, allow for new services: to the Hospital and/or train station for example. It was suggested that affordable housing should be located closer to bus stops and that it was not advisable to build initial phases at the back of a site and furthest away from existing bus stops.• The cost of parking in Cheltenham for two hours was the same as it had been 10 years ago. Stagecoach, were willing to work in partnership with the council and develop a written agreement that if parking charges increased, bus fares would be reduced. Nottingham City Council had introduced a Workplace Parking Levy (WPL); a charge on employers who provide workplace parking, a type of congestion charging scheme. Money raised from the WPL goes towards the extension of the existing tram system, the redevelopment of Nottingham Rail Station and also supports the Link bus network. <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that these were areas where there was scope to explore the options within existing projects/initiatives such as when planning the North West</p>

	<p>Development and reviewing the car parking strategy for Council. The congestion issues should be raised with the county council as part of local transport planning for Cheltenham.</p> <p>Council may like to instruct Officers to ensure these areas are covered in relevant project scopes or request that Gloucestershire County Council, where applicable, investigate further.</p>
2.	Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>If the Housing White Paper becomes law as currently drafted, will the Council increase its planning fees by 20 to 40% from July 2017 and invest that additional income into increasing the number of our planning officers?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>The White Paper is currently out for consultation, to which we will be responding.</p> <p>We welcome the ability of local authorities to increase planning fees as this was part of the Gloucestershire devolution bid and recent lobbying by Cheltenham's Director of Planning to DCLG over autumn 2016.</p> <p>Over the past 2 years focus has been placed upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning team and as a result we have seen an increase in performance, helping to deliver decisions in a timely manner.</p> <p>As part of this improvement process and the commercialisation agenda, the planning pre application service has been redesigned, including reviewing pre application and advice fees. It is important that we maintain momentum on this performance and investment in capacity will help us do that.</p> <p>Since the publication of the White Paper government has now written to all local planning authorities setting out the 'offer' of the 20% increase in fees; this is wholly conditional on existing baseline and income assumptions not being adjusted down and the additional 20% being committed to investment in the planning department.</p> <p>As part of this improvement process and the commercialisation agenda I welcome this offer, and will be instructing the Council's 151 Officer to confirm our acceptance within the next few days.</p>
3.	Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	<p>How many tenants managed by CBH take up the £500 incentive to downsize to a smaller property (via the My Move Scheme)? How many CBH homes are occupied by couples and single occupiers?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Since its introduction in December 2012 the number of CBC tenants to date who have been assisted to downsize using the My Move scheme is 125. The total number of CBC and CBH tenancies is currently 4,566. Of this there are 3,518 sole tenancies and 1,048 joint tenancies. Please note that sole tenancies will include couples and not necessarily "single occupiers". In terms of "relationship status" our latest profiling information shows the following:</p>



4. Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan

Recent research by commercial property firm Savoy Stewart shows that Cheltenham is historically one of the toughest towns in the UK to launch a new business. Business start-ups have an 87% chance of failing within Cheltenham. What is the Council doing to improve this shocking situation?

Response from Cabinet Member

Whenever statistics like this are produced it is important to understand their significance. When Savoy Stewart produced them last year David Owen, chief executive of GFirst LEP, said: "It is important to understand that the definition of 'failure' in this report includes businesses that have been taken over or merged, as well as those that actually closed. Within Gloucestershire we see a very active merger and acquisition market across the whole county."

It is equally true that any business moving out of the borough but continuing to trade would also be included in the figures quoted.

It is also interesting to note that in 2016 there were 1041 new business start-ups in Cheltenham which is the highest for any district in Gloucestershire and over 25% of the total 3980 in the county.

The Cheltenham Economic Strategy (2015) which informs both the emerging Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and the emerging Cheltenham Plan draws attention to improving business survival rates since the time of the recession. Between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of businesses surviving for 1 year fell from 97.5% to 88.2% but in 2011, this rate had increased substantially to 93.2%. Whilst these statistics are not directly comparable figures contained in the Savoy Stewart Report, at the very least they seem to be at considerable odds.

As part of the JCS this council is aiming to ensure new employment sites are provided to assist local businesses who wish to expand without having to move out of the area. We have also encouraged successful start-ups by funding a small business advice service for a number of years and are now working to secure a base for the Gloucestershire Growth Network in

	Cheltenham to continue and enhance that role. This seems to be nearing a successful conclusion and I would hope that details can be announced shortly.																																																				
5.	Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan																																																				
	How much has CBC spent on consultancy support over the last 5 years, by management area?																																																				
	Response from Cabinet Member																																																				
	<p>Consultancy services are bought in as needed to provide expert advice on an ad-hoc basis, rather than retaining specialist staff on the payroll. In many instances, these costs are part of a wider project, with funding being contributed by other parties. For instance work relating to 2020 Vision and Gloucestershire Airport was jointly funded with other councils.</p> <p>The figures below are based on transactions coded to consultancy and professional fees on the Agresso finance system.</p> <p><u>Consultancy Fees 2012/13 to 2016/17 (@21/2/17)</u></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CostC</th> <th>CostC(T)</th> <th>Amount</th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="4">Head of Paid Service -</td> </tr> <tr> <td>COR001</td> <td>Corporate Management</td> <td>67,664.04</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>COR102</td> <td>2020 Vision</td> <td>108,049.44</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>CSM001</td> <td>Cultural - Service Management and Support Services</td> <td>12,943.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SUP104</td> <td>L & C Trust set up costs</td> <td>61,073.39</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOU002</td> <td>Tourist/Visitor Information Centre</td> <td>9,205.15</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SUP017</td> <td>Business Improvement/Transformation</td> <td>4,464.70</td> <td>263,399.72</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">REST -</td> </tr> <tr> <td>AIR101</td> <td>Gloucestershire Airport</td> <td>105,914.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>ECD001</td> <td>Economic Development</td> <td>20,000.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SUP040</td> <td>Built Environment</td> <td>5,668.68</td> <td>131,582.68</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td><u>394,982.40</u></td> <td><u>394,982.40</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	CostC	CostC(T)	Amount		Head of Paid Service -				COR001	Corporate Management	67,664.04		COR102	2020 Vision	108,049.44		CSM001	Cultural - Service Management and Support Services	12,943.00		SUP104	L & C Trust set up costs	61,073.39		TOU002	Tourist/Visitor Information Centre	9,205.15		SUP017	Business Improvement/Transformation	4,464.70	263,399.72	REST -				AIR101	Gloucestershire Airport	105,914.00		ECD001	Economic Development	20,000.00		SUP040	Built Environment	5,668.68	131,582.68			<u>394,982.40</u>	<u>394,982.40</u>
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6.	Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay																																																				
	How much has CBC raised from off-street parking charges in the last 5 years and what has it been spent on?																																																				
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	<p>The Council publishes, on an annual basis, full details of its parking income and expenditure on the transparency pages of the website.</p> <p>In 2012-13, the Council was still responsible for on-street parking, so for clarity of comparisons, I have excluded this year from my response and provide data for each of the last four years.</p>																																																				

I can confirm the following in relation to the last four years:-

Year	Income	Expenditure	Net surplus
2013-14	£3,848,283	£1,939,639	£1,908,914
2014-15	£3,504,859	£2,192,492	£1,312,368
2015-16	£3,547,562	£2,383,275	£1,164,287
2016-17 to 22/02/17	£3,356,175	£2,463,874	£ 892,301
Totals	£14,256,879	£8,979,280	£5,277,870

The net surplus we receive from supplying car parking services firstly helps to fund car park improvement projects, and secondly helps to pay for other council services, as allowed for under S.55 of the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984.

These other council services include:-

Street cleansing, sports and open spaces, parks and gardens. However, it should be noted that the council spends far more on these services than it generates in 'surplus' parking revenue.

Across the years shown above, net expenditure on these services was as follows:-

Street cleansing	£3,199,396
Sports and open spaces	£5,011,715
Parks and gardens	£4,245,221
Totals	£12,456,332

7. Question from Councillor Chris Nelson to Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Following his experience sleeping rough earlier this month, how has that developed his thinking on how to address the very real problem of people sleeping on the streets? Is he closer to recommending a solution/range of solutions? What extra money and resources will be found to help these unfortunate people find homes and live a more normal life?

Response from Cabinet Member

Homelessness, rough sleeping or just existing on our streets is reaching crisis point as there has been a 100% increase in 4 to 5 years. Government austerity is having the worst impact on the most vulnerable in our town, as the cabinet member with responsibility for the policies which effect the people existing on our streets, it seemed right that I gain an understanding of their life's. Living for 72 hours in the world of the homeless was my challenge, what an eye-opening experience. What kind, polite and empathetic people existing on the edge of humanity mostly invisible and more often ignored. The current support arrangement cannot cope with the drastic rising demand, the system itself is at breaking point. One of my next steps will be to look at our budgets, resources and partnerships to see how they may be better applied.

Not all members have had the opportunity to read the statement below so if you will forgive my indulgence, this was an initial reflection of the 72-hour experience, I'm sure this view will play it's part in my thinking moving forward.

My time living on the streets of Cheltenham

As I woke up from my third night on the streets, I started to feel it. Sleep deprivation had kicked in, so the word didn't come to me immediately and it still hasn't as I start to write this article at home in the warm. Feeling unable to move my mouth to speak properly or even bring to mind the right words wasn't a side effect I'd imagined.

Stretching in a vain attempt to rid my bones of the deepest imaginable chill, I was sure about one thing: I was in a very different position to the other people who had spent that Saturday night in the nooks and crannies of Cheltenham town centre. As a council cabinet member for housing, I knew I could make changes to help and had already started to ask myself what should be done. And answering that question is how I had found myself waking up on the streets.

As anyone involved in the public sector will tell you, the starting point of answering any question is usually some form of consultation. This means anyone who may be affected by a policy change can have their say. But in the case of rough sleepers or street people you can't really ask the people whose lives will be most impacted. When somebody's main tasks every day are gathering a few pounds for a meal, staying warm and then finding a place to sleep, why would they bother to take part in something like a council consultation? And if they're living on the streets or in insecure accommodation it's pretty unlikely they'd even find out in the first place.

To get over this hurdle I carried out my own hands-on consultation and my experiences over those three nights will stay with me for the rest of my life. I won't be able to shake off that uncomfortable feeling – the name of which I still can't bring to my sleep deprived mind – for some time. I'll always remember the feelings of vulnerability and I'll always remember the bone-creaking cold.

Layer by layer, piece by piece, a homeless person is cast adrift from society to a point where people are either embarrassed or disgusted. I am firmly in the embarrassed category. I'm embarrassed that our nation has totally failed to deal with the housing crisis to a point at which homelessness has doubled in four years. I'm embarrassed that our government has forced people into this situation. Even in Cheltenham, which by most standards is a fairly well-off town, we have experienced a near 100% increase in rough sleeping since 2013.

Add to the ranks of homeless people those who are begging for survival and you have a picture of a system failing to cope. We have so many people in crises that local authorities and charities are at breaking point.

It didn't take long to find out how the failures of government have left homeless people in a situation so horrifically removed from the basic comfort they deserve. Sitting on a street full of shops, cafés and the hustle of bustle of people going about their lives, the first thing I realised was that I had no purpose. I sat without anything to do and this apparently caused me to become invisible. Very occasionally I came back into view when a kind person would stop and talk, but invariably most people walked by, some looking past me and others looking through me. Given the negative perceptions about homeless people and those in poverty perpetuated over many years, this was hardly a surprise.

The lack of human interaction makes the time pass grindingly slowly, but one way to make it speed up is drop in sessions at charity locations. These offer warmth with a hot drink and some food without any feeling that you are invisible or being judged. Spending time speaking to support workers, volunteers and street people quickly equipped me with the little knowledge needed to survive but other nuggets of information would be learned along the way, making survival slightly easier. But you can't stay forever. Just like you can't stay forever nursing one morning warm-up coffee in McDonald's.

Along with the slowness of the day, I also found the nights slowed down. Rough sleeping is a slight misnomer because it implies there is an amount of sleeping involved. A more accurate

description would be: “rough lying down, avoiding the damp/wet, lessening the cold, cat napping in fear”. Homeless people I spoke to told me that having a choice of a ‘spot’ is paramount because your previous spot may not be available. If you’re lucky, you might even find an upgrade to a better spot. A decent amount of sleep can have such a massive effect on your wellbeing that it does occupy a lot of your thought during the day.

The remainder of my thoughts on the streets then and at home now turn to the people I met. Understandably they were at first quite wary when faced with someone who they perceived to be in authority. They were also wary about my apparent interest in their plight – perhaps a sign that they were used to being treated as a walking crisis rather than a human. They were shocked and pleased in equal measure when I asked for their opinions. So it didn’t take long before word spread and I felt accepted on the street. OK, perhaps I was tolerated rather than accepted, but that was good enough.

I learned so much about the complex array of individual circumstances impacting street people. I won’t use their real names for fear of embarrassing them, but I met a man called Dave who had no visible personal crisis at all aside from the lack of a home. I met others, such as Tara, who was an alcoholic and told me this was the only way she could get through the day. I met John, who was a longstanding drug addict. Many of them had mental health issues to varying degrees. They were old and young, mostly male but a few female, some with accommodation some without. None of them were being treated as an individual, they were victims of circumstance and each had an individual crisis that was worsened by life on the streets. Most hauntingly, I met a man who was in his 50s. He smelt strongly of alcohol. I asked him about his situation and his response was stark and heart-breaking in equal measure: “after twenty years living in my tent I’m just waiting to die”. In his case, all hope had gone. In many others, I met hope was very distant.

Spending time with and talking to around 25 people existing on our streets I was blown away by their empathy for others and the kindness they showed towards me. There was also a surprising constant theme, this theme was expressed in a variety of ways, some with anger often with deflated resignation. “It doesn’t work” and or “it isn’t fair.” They were talking about, of course, ‘the system’. The set of rules, the bureaucracy and the inflexible approach to dealing with complex individual crises.

Having spent 72 hours in a different world – one growing at an alarming rate - I have a final thought. Where self-worth has been suppressed to a point at which it no longer may be restored, where addiction grips people to the point of near death on the streets and where people lose all hope of ever having even basic shelter, our society has failed.

P.S. As my mind starts to work again I can remember the word I was searching for when I started writing: dehumanised. To be homeless is to have your status as a member of the human race cruelly taken away. Those of us who can help must do everything we can to give it back.