

Member Questions – Cabinet, 15th September 2020

1.	Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to the Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	How many homeless people from Cheltenham have been moved out of the Borough to temporary accommodation elsewhere in the Country?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Since the 1st April 2017 (and up until the 24.08.20) there have been 170 recorded emergency homeless placements out of the Borough, which is equivalent to less than 1 emergency placement/week. Such placements are generally short term in nature (for instance, as at 1st September 2020, there are 4 placements currently out of the Borough). Please also note that these are placements as opposed to clients – as some clients may be placed more than once.</p> <p>It should also be noted these figures do not include placements into hotel accommodation during the response to Covid-19 (though again, as at 1st September, there are 3 clients placed by Cheltenham remaining in these hotels).</p>
	Supplementary question
	Do we let local authorities know if we have made a placement in their area?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Responsibility for the households (in terms of housing duties, linking up to relevant support services, etc.) remains with the LA making the placement, not with the receiving LA. Our Housing Options Team also works collaboratively across the districts at an operational level, so that should any issues be identified they can be picked up with the relevant local authority. Placements are therefore not always followed up with an official notification as such; though going forward the team will be happy do this.
2.	Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to the Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries
	How many homeless people have been moved into temporary accommodation in Cheltenham Borough by other councils?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	We are not normally notified of emergency homelessness placements into our Borough. Should a local authority make such a placement, it will generally be on a short-term, emergency basis while alternative solutions are sourced locally.
	Supplementary question
	There seem to be problems caused for people moved away from their home towns to other locations. Has the Borough made any representations to make giving this information compulsory?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	As detailed above, responsibility for the households (in terms of housing duties, linking up to relevant support services, etc.) remain with the LA making the

	<p>placement, not with the receiving LA, and again, because of the close collaborative arrangements across districts it hasn't been considered necessary to insist on official notification of placements. Going forward, we have asked the Housing Options Team to make this request to our partners.</p>
3.	<p>Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman</p>
	<p>As lockdown was eased, there were increased incidence of litter and anti-social behaviour in the parks and gardens in Cheltenham, which included reports of drug paraphernalia being left by young people. Following this there was joint working by Cheltenham Borough Council and the Police to deal with these issues. How many additional bins were provided as a result of the increase in litter? What youth outreach work has taken place during the summer in our parks and gardens, to engage with young people to prevent the use of harmful drugs through education?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>During the lockdown period all our available stock of 10 bins were installed to provide additional capacity and the majority of these were put into Montpellier Gardens. During this period Ubico reported that the bins already provided were often empty or only half full and that litter was just being left on the floor. Whilst the additional bins have provided extra bin capacity, the most significant difference has been made by Ubico changing the litter picking and bin emptying schedule. Additional resource has been diverted to litter picking and bin emptying to keep Cheltenham tidy. The 'Don't be a Tosser' campaign supports the need for us all to be responsible for our litter and put it in a bin. More recently a Recycle and Go bin set has been installed in Montpellier Gardens on a trial basis and we are starting to see the recycling bins being used.</p> <p>There was increased ASB in the parks that was a response to many factors and the borough council worked through the Town Centre Enforcement Team with the Police to put in place an action plan. We experienced a period of very warm weather and amendments in lockdown guidance that allowed more personal interpretation of the rules.</p> <p>We worked with the Police and continue to work with the Police, not just following the reports of ASB and drug paraphernalia, to understand where demand was and took the necessary steps together (meetings, bins, patrols and regular communication) to pre-empt and address areas of note.</p> <p>The Police have been supported by members of Young Glos, to complete outreach work with young people at locations where we had identified that they were congregating. This allowed a positive engagement with them and provided reassurance for local residents.</p>
4.	<p>Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</p>
	<p>Now that the trial of traffic changes at Boots Corner has ended, when will the fake grass, which was introduced as a temporary 'improvement' be removed? When it is removed will it be replaced with something environmentally and ecologically friendly (as well as more pleasing on the eye)?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>We fully acknowledge that the fake grass is not the ideal solution and does not</p>

	<p>meet our long term environmental aspirations at present.</p> <p>Whilst I would like to reassure you that this will not be a permanent fixture, the temporary solution has been well utilised by the public as an area to convene, rest and play due to all the additional seating the scheme has provided, so whilst there is a need to plan for a permanent solution, what exists continues to form part of the place making of this part of the High Street.</p> <p>Unfortunately, with the proposed changes to Boots Corner not going ahead, new decisions and plans will need to be made by the County Council (in its role as the Highways Authority) to determine the future of the road network in the area. These decisions will inform this Council's approach to future design work in the area.</p> <p>Boots Corner improvements will be delivered as part of the overall proposals for the High Street regeneration – the next phase of which is due to be Cambray and the Strand. All of which is subject to our Covid recovery strategy going forward.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Councillor Sudbury</p>
	<p>Please can borough councillors receive a written briefing note/fact sheet with information on the following issues (and any other the cabinet member or officers feel is relevant to the faux grass and points raised in the answer):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) I understand toxic PFAS chemicals have been found in some faux lawns. Could the briefing note include information on what chemicals are in the faux lawn at Boots Corner, including any risk assessment around health impact on humans of close contact with the lawn? b) Information on anticipated chemical run off from the plinth into the watercourse and how that can be mitigated as the grass is in situ longer than anticipated c) Information on the cleaning regime for the faux lawn, particularly in light of Covid – for example, has the cleaning regime been made more frequent? d) An update on the changes to the High Street referred to in the answer which members are not already be aware of. e) Information on any planned changes to traffic flow at Boots Corner that are being promoted by Cheltenham Borough Council and which may be implemented by GCC which members are not already be aware of.
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A review has been undertaken on the claims of PFAS chemicals in the artificial grass installed at Boots Corner and the health impact to humans. The review concluded that there was at most, a very low level of concern from exposure as the concentration of hazardous material is very negligible and below the limits the EU allows. Furthermore, a review of utilisation of the installation by officers has shown that the majority of users of Boots Corner choose to sit on the dedicated seating provided, over the artificial grass itself. b) In line with the review mentioned above, the condition of the artificial grass remains good, along with the covering installation and so there is minimal concern for run-off into the watercourse.

	<p>c) No adjustments to the cleaning regime were required other than more frequent litter picking and bin emptying due to the additional usage of the area by members of the public. Jet washing has continued to take place during COVID-19 on the artificial grass area and paved areas. A mechanical sweeper also makes its way around street furniture where possible and where it is too tight for the sweeper, manual sweeping takes place.</p> <p>d) An update on the Strand and Cambray Place Improvements was provided on Monday 3rd June 2019 (https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=15612) but COVID-19 has put all progress to these plans on hold until further notice.</p> <p>e) CBC officers are currently in conversation with Gloucestershire County Council about the next steps with Boots Corner.</p>
5.	Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay
	<p>The Urban Gulls Scrutiny Task Group Report from November 2018 concluded that “If nothing is done by CBC to control the urban gull population, it could grow exponentially. This is because of the long life span of gulls, the relative safety of nesting in Cheltenham, plentiful food sources, the social nature of gulls, and the fact that each breeding pair can rear up to three chicks a year. This would be detrimental to the quality of life of local residents and could impact negatively on the visitor experience during the breeding season.” In light of this, please can the Cabinet member outline the progress made to date on recommendations from the Urban Gull Task Group report?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>A decision was made by senior management not to undertake the egg oiling programme this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>In January this year an update was given to O&S detailing progress made on recommendations from the Urban Gull Task Group report and officers have reported that no further work has been undertaken to date since this progress report.</p> <p>Subject to budget availability, many of the intended proposals outlined in the January O&S paper will be picked up in readiness for the next gull season.</p>
6.	Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman
	<p>As there are a number of takeaways near Sandford Park, a lot of the litter put in the bins in the park originates from the takeaways. However, as the bins in the park have a large top opening, gulls can easily take all the litter out and scatter it around to sort through. Please can the current bins be taken out of use and be replaced with gull proof bins?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Gulls certainly make a mess when they empty bins for the waste food that they contain and this isn't just limited to Sandford Park. Less people about does seem to have made the gulls braver but hopefully when normality resumes the situation will improve again.</p>

	<p>In line with the government's Resources and Waste Strategy published in December 2018 which encourages waste reduction and re-use, officers are working with Ubico to seek to retrofit gull proof lids to the existing bins so they can be re-used rather than thrown away. Unfortunately supply chain issues as a direct result of Covid-19 are slowing down responses from suppliers.</p> <p>I am sure we wait with interest to see what the government will do on the Extended Producer Responsibility issue on packaging and whether this will extend to take away food packaging.</p>
	Supplementary question from Councillor Sudbury
	<p>Thank you. I understand the point about this issue not being limited to Sandford Park but this park is really close to a number of late night takeaways in a way that places like many other of the towns parks aren't. Having picked up the litter scattered around the bins in Sandford Park by gulls it is clear that it is litter from nearby takeaways that is their meal of choice. I understand that it may be difficult to retrospectively fit with a lid the bins that are there and that they would be difficult and costly to remove, but I am really keen to see a solution to this issue. Could sponsorship be looked into to see if local businesses would sponsor the removal of the existing bins and replacement with gull proof ones?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I agree that it is an unsightly problem, and we working with Ubico to put it right. My understanding is that it is mostly a supply chain issue caused by Covid rather than a financial issue, and I would be happy to look at sponsorship possibilities to take things forward.</p>
7.	Question from Councillor Klara Sudbury to Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Rowena Hay
	<p>Please could the cabinet member give an update on the progress of the joint working between CBC and GCC to bring the footpath over Pilley Bridge Nature Reserve back into use footpath back into use or to replace it?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Councillor Sudbury will hopefully recall that the bridge she refers to in her question formed part of the 2020/21 budget proposals that were debated and agreed by Full Council in February 2020. I recall that Councillor Sudbury felt the wording at paragraph 6.5 was ambiguous, and asked whether the wording could be changed to 'originally allocated to the restoration of the unsafe bridge in Pilley Nature Reserve which has led to the closure of the public footpath behind old pats'.</p> <p>The budget proposals were formulated on the grounds that the Council needed to prioritise its diminishing resources to the delivery of its corporate plan priorities. This is even more so the case given the financial uncertainty and fallout from Covid-19. The budget proposals agreed, included re-allocating £75k to climate change from the planned maintenance reserve which was originally set aside to part-fund the restoration of the bridge. The bridge had a number of footpaths to enable crossing, however it was agreed by Full Council that the budget would be better off allocated to delivering more benefit for the whole town by being in the climate emergency budget. Ultimately Full Council agreed the benefit for the</p>

	<p>whole town must be considered.</p> <p>It is my understanding that the bridge footpath surface is the responsibility of the County Council and the closure of access at both ends was undertaken by them perhaps as the county councillor you could ask the county for an update.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Councillor Sudbury</p>
	<p>The county council have most recently told me the following – <i>‘The county council would like to work in partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council to progress a project at Greatfield Road/Pilley Footbridge, in recognition that, while the borough council has a responsibility as owner of the bridge, and the land it crosses, the county is responsible for the footpath running across it. While we can’t dedicate a specific sum to it at this stage, we do need to work with the Borough Council and to find a satisfactory solution to the community severance caused by the bridge closure. Ideally a project could start by clearing vegetation from around the immediate bridge so an assessment can be done as to possible repairs or replacement options, though it is unlikely to be repairable. However no detailed survey has yet been carried out.’</i></p> <p>The county tell me they have been pursuing this issue with CBC but had no substantive reply yet. This may be because of changes in personnel or understandably issues relating to Covid?</p> <p>Can I request that CBC agrees to work in partnership with GCC to enable the initial ground works to be done so that the scope and costs of the project can be better understood. This would be with a view to a larger partnership solution to funding replacing the bridge, which could include the involvement of CK Parish Council, FOPBNR and the local community – through crowdfunding or grant funding? I am optimistic that such a partnership approach could be successful but it needs the ground work to prepare this approach to even be considered.</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>We have spent a great deal of time working with GCC to find a resolution. I refer back to my original answer: the tender process resulted in a minimum cost of £350k to rebuild the bridge, which was not justifiable. We put forward £75k as a justifiable contribution. The bridge was shut by the county council, and since then both authorities have been working towards a resolution. We would be happy to meet with the county council, parish council and wider community to see how the money could be raised.</p>