

Council

6 December 2021

Member Questions

(12 total)

1.	Question from Councillor John Payne to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	The council's decision to fund the provision of the ice rink on Imperial Gardens as part of an initiative to encourage increased footfall over the Christmas period is welcome but with reservations. The ice rink is being powered by one of two very large diesel generators. How does the Cabinet Member justify one of the most polluting sources of energy generation in the centre of a town that has declared a climate emergency?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for the question Cllr Payne. The use of a diesel generator as the main power source of the ice rink is an unavoidable consequence of there being an insufficient supply of mains electrical power to Imperial Gardens to maintain the rink. This is not a new scenario however and frequently necessitates the use of ancillary power units/generators in Imperial Gardens for many of the larger events and festivals that take place here (as is also the case in Montpellier Gardens).</p> <p>The need for upgraded infrastructure at these sites – and others in Cheltenham – coupled with new innovations in energy sources and fuel types was identified in the Council's interim Events Strategy (published last year). This is currently being actively explored therefore with potential solutions being identified as part of our climate change agenda and a more sustainable approach to events in the town.</p> <p>Over the 6 weeks of the ice rink's operation, we expect to welcome upwards of 30,000 skaters to enjoy this event in Cheltenham (with the additional spend within the town centre as a consequence). Whilst we cannot suggest of course that each and every one of these would have travelled elsewhere to enjoy the distinctive festive experience of a Christmas ice rink (Gloucester or Malvern being the closest), had Cheltenham's ice rink not gone ahead, it is not unreasonable to assume that a proportion of this number will have made a far longer journey to visit one of these other rinks with the consequent emissions and impact from these journeys.</p>
2.	Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	Can the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency justify the generators for the Imperial Square Ice Rink, given that they are run on diesel fuel, and also given that they are producing a permanent hum which is preventing residents in the Square from sleeping?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you for the question Cllr Seacome. In line with the earlier response to Cllr Payne, due to their being an insufficient supply of mains electrical power to Imperial Gardens, as with many temporary events that take place in our town centre parks and which are enjoyed by so many all year round, the use of a diesel generator is currently the only way of providing sufficient power to such events on these sites.</p> <p>The use of a generator was set out in the planning application which received unanimous approval at the Planning Committee on 14 October 2021.</p> <p>The low frequency resonance from the generator is the subject of targeted and</p>

	<p>ongoing mitigation actions in line with advice from a specialist acoustic consultant and our Council Environmental Health colleagues. A number of incremental steps continue to be taken on-site alongside the ice rink operator, with demonstrable improvements to this low frequency issue already having been implemented. Additional measures and testing is underway and all parties are committed to resolving the situation as swiftly and effectively as possible.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone</p>
	<p>At a recent O&S Committee meeting the Head of Planning confirmed that residents were important stakeholders when considering a planning application and that no other stakeholder carried more sway. With regard to the Ice Rink's planning application does the cabinet member agree that the acoustic report was flawed? If so, how could the committee fairly consider the application from the residents' viewpoint?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>Thank you Councillor Mason, you are correct that residents are important stakeholders in the planning process.</p> <p>The commissioning of an acoustic report was a condition of the Planning Committee's approval. In line with this condition, the report was commissioned and completed prior to the installation of the generator. The consultant's submitted report was formulated in accordance with the relevant BS 4142 (British Standard) with valid data and mitigation measures identified. The report and noise impact assessment concluded that the running of the generator would result in a conclusion of low impact. Upon approval by both Environmental Health and Planning, this condition was therefore discharged.</p> <p>Since operation of the ice rink has commenced, the council has been engaged with residents and working closely with the ice rink operator, engineers from the company supplying the generators and the acoustic consultant to find the right solution to address current concerns that relate to the existence of a very low frequency resonance emanating from the generator. A number of mitigations that have been implemented so far have significantly improved the situation and further measures are currently being implemented in line with the acoustic consultant's latest recommendations.</p> <p>Planning Committee had available to them the relevant information to assess the planning application, this included the views of residents and the detail regarding noise, section 6 of the officers report sets this out https://publicaccess.cheltenham.gov.uk/online-applications/files/252327832D282926656E84ABED99A77D/pdf/21_01856_FUL-OFFICER_REPORT-1198775.pdf. The debate at planning committee on 14th October 2021 included review of residents concerns https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/g3299/Printed%20minutes%2014th-Oct-2021%2014.30%20Planning%20Committee.pdf?T=1.</p> <p>We are continuing to work collectively to improve matters further and will continue our dialogue with yourself and Cllr Seacome to share our progress towards an acceptable resolution.</p>

4.	Question from Councillor Chris Mason to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone
	Prior to the Ice Rink's planning application a meeting was held with local residents and officers from Cheltenham BID and Marketing Cheltenham. At this meeting the residents were promised quiet generators. Given the number of complaints from residents do you agree that the Council has failed to meet this promise?
	Response from Cabinet Member
	Again, thank you for your question Cllr Mason. As with the earlier response, in line with the planning condition attached to the Planning Committee's approval on 14 th October 2021, the Council has sought professional advice from a specialist acoustic consultant on the use of a generator to power the ice rink. The resulting noise impact assessment advised that the generator would result in a conclusion of low impact – which is consistent with the information provided by officers at the meeting with local residents to which you refer. Having undertaken a further assessment following the installation and running of the generator, the presence of a particularly low frequency tonal characteristic was recorded, which has been found to be the primary cause for complaint. The Council is now acting on and implementing the acoustic consultant's recommendations in order to mitigate this issue.
5.	Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	Recently Councillor Baker arranged a meeting between Park/College Ward Councillors and representatives of Bath Road traders. There was broad agreement that the condition of the Bath Road toilets was poor and that the Council should be asked both to retain the facility and to make significant improvements. Will the Cabinet Member agree to include in the budget for the 202/23 financial provision for improvements.”
	Response from Cabinet Member
	The capital programme in the draft budget proposal will be available for consultation from 22 December 2021. There are currently no plans to include the Bath Road toilets in the capital programme for 2022/23. Property Services have been notified of your concerns and will be carrying out a site visit to the toilets before Christmas to determine whether any reactive repairs work is required. There was a review on the provision of public conveniences as Cllr Harman will I am sure recall, this was a paper that was brought forward pre pandemic it is absolutely right that we revisit this paper across all of the facilities and I will keep members informed.
6.	Question from Councillor Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	On 7 th December last year the Cabinet Member replied to a question from me about plans to install electric vehicle charging points into the Bath Road Car Park and others. As we approach the first anniversary of my question and his reply can he update Council on progress and possibly give target dates for installation
	Response from Cabinet Member
	As Council are aware, our focus over the last 12 months has been to support and manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Cheltenham. As we emerge from the pandemic, focus is now turning to how we can adapt to support the town's longer term economic recovery. As part of our recovery strategy, we are currently

	<p>considering the installation of off-street EV charging points. In assessing potential locations we need to consider factors such as electricity provision, current car parking capacity, planning restrictions and surrounding facilities. Bath Road car park is one of 14 car parks operated by the Council which will be assessed to determine where would be the most appropriate location.</p>
7.	Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	<p>Could the Cabinet Member please update members on his discussions with Cheltenham's taxi drivers in relation to the implementation of the WAV policy, as discussed at Council in June?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>I thank Councillor Savage for his question and welcome the opportunity it gives me to update council.</p> <p>Several meetings were held with the licensed taxi trade following the Council meeting in June. I met with the Taxi Drivers Association, operators and individual drivers twice in June, in August and most recently in November.</p> <p>Separate meetings were also had with the Cheltenham Access Forum on a number of occasions.</p> <p>During these meetings, it became clear that the deadline of 31 December 2021 for all hackney cab vehicles to become wheelchair accessible was not compatible with our ambition to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as it would require many new diesel vehicle purchases.</p> <p>It was also obvious that many drivers were genuinely facing financial difficulty in the wake of the pandemic.</p> <p>Given the imminent decisions to purchase that drivers were having to make on council advice, it then became clear that to maintain the 31 December deadline would not be right, so an urgent decision was taken by the leader and chief executive in September to lift this deadline, while I announced our ambition to move to a new policy that achieved both 100% wheelchair accessibility and net zero by 2030. I am pleased that representatives of both the Access Forum and the Cheltenham Taxi Drivers Association welcomed this announcement.</p> <p>I also want to thank the the Taxi Drivers Association and the Cheltenham Access Forum for taking the time to meet with me.</p>
8.	Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	<p>Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on leaf-clearance efforts undertaken by CBC and its partner organisations? Specifically, residents have raised concerns in relation to uncleared pavements and potentially blocked drains in Beaufort Road/Oak Avenue, an area which is at risk of flooding. If plans are not in place for urgent leaf clearance in this area, can this please be prioritised?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Every year Cheltenham's leaf clearance, supporting flood alleviation, commences early autumn across the borough and concludes at the end of winter. Our prioritisation plan focuses on the areas highlighted below before moving into other residential</p>

areas. Ubico monitor the Met Office weather warnings and target known flood risk areas when appropriate. I am pleased to say that all these details are available on the Council's website, for both members and the public.

- Main routes in and out of Cheltenham
- Hospital entrances and nearby pathways
- Train and bus station entrances and nearby pathways
- Outside schools and care homes
- High footfall areas i.e. town centre, shop fronts
- Areas known as high flood risks

I imagine you will all understand that our Ubico crews are in high demand during the Autumn and they will endeavour to clear leaf fall as efficiently as possible. I would urge the public to be patient as leaves are cleared as quickly as possible but please do report higher levels of leaf fall to customer services for prioritisation.

- I can confirm that Beaufort Road/Oak Avenue were mechanically swept week commencing 8/11/21 where access could be gained. Some parts could not be accessed due to parked cars. Manual leafing crews have been operating in the area since the beginning of October.
- A Ubico supervisor checked the area on the morning of 3 December and reported back that cleansing standards were considered good with very little leafing identified and minimal detritus. The only stretch of road which required some remedial works was Charlton Court Road by the garage site (Flood Hotspot), this road channel was then scheduled for clearance on the afternoon of 3 December.
- Ubico and GCC Highways have been working more closely together and have developed a more robust cleansing service in known hotspot areas. The locations where these joint deep cleansing works have taken place so far this year are as follows:

- 12/04/21 – Orrisdale Terrace
- 13/04/21 – College Rd (Part)
- 14/04/21 – Suffolk Sq
- 15/04/21 – Lyefield Rd E
- 20/04/21 – Montpellier Terrace (Part)
- 02/06/21 – Roman Road
- 09/07/21 – Naunton Lane Cycle Path
- 15/07/21 – Pilley Lane & Pilley Crescent
- 21/07/21 – Montpellier Spa Road
- 12/08/21 – Asquith Rd & Churchill Rd
- 16/09/21 – Church Road (Leck)
- 19/10/21 – Upper Park St
- 19/11/21 – Moorend Pk Rd (Part)

9. Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing and Business, Councillor Victoria Atherstone

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm that all restrictions imposed on children's

	<p>parks and play facilities owned/operated by CBC have been lifted? Specifically, can she confirm that all swings/play equipment removed in order to facilitate social distancing requirements have been reinstated?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>Current government guidance (November 22nd 2021) covering public outdoor spaces and play areas still recommends the encouragement of cleaning and hygiene therefore play area signage previously installed has been left in place to reflect this.</p> <p>Social distancing came to an end of July 19th 2021, and therefore swing seats that had been removed to facilitate this have been reinstated.</p>
10.	<p>Question from Councillor Richard Pinegar to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood</p> <p>Noise pollution is a menace and a health problem for our communities. Particularly where we have high density housing like Benhall Gardens, Wasley Road, Monkscroft, beside the A40 and Cowper Road, Australia House, Hobart House and others beside PE way. I know of people in those blocks who are badly affected by the constant sound of thrashing engines, loud exhausts, and, since Cheltenham A&E closed, constant sirens from the emergency services. In addition to this, on the 27-29 October, for M5 maintenance, a constant stream of trucks with squealing brakes and honking horns ran right through the night, 3, 4, 5 am, denying our roadside residents 3 nights of sleep.</p> <p>Noise divides our communities, what options do we have as a council to work with GCC towards a reduction in road traffic noise and which other groups can we work with to deter the main polluters; motorbikes, trucks and performance-tuned cars?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>I share Cllr Pinegar's concerns about noise pollution from vehicles and the health impact which this can have on those communities in closest proximity.</p> <p>We have limited powers as a district authority to deal with noise from routine traffic on existing roads. However, the powers we do have include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring suitable fenestration (windows) through the planning system for new, or amended, residential property affected by traffic noise. • Statutory nuisance powers relating to noise can include action on specific items on the street (such as heavy plant used for road works), but cannot be applied to general road traffic. • The Police can use Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles being used to cause anti-social behaviour, including through modified noisy exhausts, or loud stereo systems. They can also investigate the use of vehicle horns outside limited hours (you're not supposed to sound your horn on any 'restricted road' between the hours of 11.30pm and 7am). <p>Many of the discussions we are having with GCC, for instance through the JCS process and in relation to our air quality strategy, focus on reducing traffic levels and in particular, the most polluting vehicles, which would have the added benefit of reducing noise pollution as well.</p> <p>There is obviously the potential to add further pressure on GCC, through joint working with many organisations and community groups, including environmental</p>

	organisations like Vision 21 and Clean Air Cheltenham.																																
11.	Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood																																
	How many planning approvals are currently outstanding which are over and above the appropriate statutory limits of 8, 10, 13 or 16 weeks? What local KPIs are in place to ensure these limits are met? How does Cheltenham compare to similar LPAs with regards to performance, particularly on application approval times?																																
	Response from Cabinet Member																																
	Councillor Nelson the data as requested is as follows for applications outside the determinations dates: 8 weeks – 34 applications 13 weeks – 3 applications 16 weeks - 1 application which is currently subject to a non determination appeal. The Planning service performance over the most recently published quarter 2021 Q2, benchmarked against neighbouring authorities, is as follows:																																
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Total Decisions</th> <th>% Granted</th> <th>% Determined in Time</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Cheltenham</td> <td>432</td> <td>97</td> <td>93</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gloucester</td> <td>199</td> <td>90</td> <td>92</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tewksbury</td> <td>225</td> <td>92</td> <td>72</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cotswold</td> <td>476</td> <td>97</td> <td>59</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stroud</td> <td>457</td> <td>90</td> <td>94</td> </tr> <tr> <td>South West</td> <td>13,705</td> <td>92</td> <td>86</td> </tr> <tr> <td>England</td> <td>111,705</td> <td>89</td> <td>86</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Total Decisions	% Granted	% Determined in Time	Cheltenham	432	97	93	Gloucester	199	90	92	Tewksbury	225	92	72	Cotswold	476	97	59	Stroud	457	90	94	South West	13,705	92	86	England	111,705	89	86
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12.	Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood																																
	What is the staff turnover rate for planning officers in the last year and how does this compare to the previous 5 years? How are reasons for staff turnover investigated, for example through exit interviews? What staff retention methods are in place, for example, reward schemes, employee engagement, and health and well-being initiatives?																																
	Response from Cabinet Member																																
	Thank you Councillor Nelson for your question. There are 16 employees in the planning team, 6 people have left in the last 5 years. There have been two leavers in 2021, which would represent an annual turnover rate of 12.5%. The average employee turnover rate in the UK is around 15%. Any employee leaving the Council will be invited to complete an exit interview questionnaire. A member of the HR team will follow up with a telephone call to discuss and further investigate reasons for leaving. The results are then fed back to the line manager and escalated where necessary. Cheltenham Borough Council conducted a wellbeing survey in April 2021 which																																

attracted an 85% response rate, demonstrating that employees are engaged and interested. 90% of respondents rated their personal wellbeing as okay, good or very good.

The Council deliver a range of employee wellbeing initiatives, discounts and engagement opportunities throughout the year alongside the reward package attached to being a Council employee such as a generous holiday entitlement, excellent pension scheme, cycle to work scheme, flexible working environment and employee welfare service.