

Council

21 March 2022

Member Questions (6 total)

1.	Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay
	<p>In Cheltenham we recognise and respect the diversity in both sexual orientation and gender identity within our town. CBC is a proud member of the LGBT+ partnership. However, the UK was named as a country of concern in a recent Congress of Council of Europe Report. The role of addressing this at local level is crucial, where the effects of hate speech is most visible. In the word of Harald Bergmann, spokesperson on Human Rights to the Council of Europe “Local Authorities are the first line of defence of human rights but also the launching pad for their application”. In light of the rise of hate speech and hate crimes across Europe and the recent, horrifying suspected homophobic attack in our town, and in line with our values, will the Leader of the Council outline what we can do, as a Council, at a local level to prevent this sort of hate crime in Cheltenham?</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader</p> <p>Thank you for your question. This is a really important issue and I want to use your question as an opportunity to reassert this council's commitment to tackling hate crime in all its guises.</p> <p>We first adopted a corporate approach to hate crime in 2010, and I am pleased that we have continued to support collective efforts particularly through the Gloucestershire county <u>hate crime strategy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure attendance at Hate Crime events• Calling out hate-crime through all our work eg social media• Community leadership role – elected members to be more informed on hate crime and to give them the confidence to challenge.• Support for community organisations that are working to challenge hate crime and promote community cohesion• Elected member seminar about hate crime to involve the police and hate crime county lead• Involvement in hate crime awareness week in October <u>https://www.goucestershire.police.uk/news/goucestershire/news/goucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/</u> <p>But as your question reminds us, we must never be complacent about an issue like hate crime that can cause so much devastation for its victims.</p> <p>I would like to set out some areas where I think we can all do more as a collective body of elected representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We can be more informed on types of hate crime and the impact on victims and the wider community• We can be clearer in our roles as community leaders and have more confidence to challenge and be able to call out hate crime through all our work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can look at how we support our community organisations that are working to challenge hate crime and that are promoting community cohesion • We should commit to being involved in hate crime awareness week in October https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-constabulary-supports-hate-crime-awareness-week-2021/ <p>One suggestion I would like to propose is to hold a member seminar about hate crime, after the elections, that will involve the police hate crime leads and the county hate crime coordinator.</p>
2.	Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to Cabinet Member Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood
	An important part of the democratic process is citizens' access to our democratic institutions. Currently, our Municipal Offices are still closed to the public. In light of national Covid restrictions being significantly relaxed, could the leader please confirm when the Municipal Offices will start to re-open again to the residents of Cheltenham.
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>We are very much committed to opening up our reception in the Municipal Offices to the public later on in the summer. Our customers' experience and safety are our highest priorities and we have taken the opportunity to learn some lessons from the pandemic to make some alterations that will offer improved customer service, including our digital inclusion offer, and create safer meeting spaces within reception.</p> <p>Whilst the majority of our customers are now successfully conducting business online or over the phone, we have continued to see customers face to face on an appointment basis throughout the pandemic. Pre-booked appointments have delivered an effective and improved customer experience, as we have been able to ensure that the appropriate staff are available to meet with customers and handle their enquiries. This is something that we will continue to offer when the reception reopens.</p> <p>As the council moves ahead with the implementation of its digital platform we are very mindful of our residents who may not be online or have a smart phone - the improved digital service within the reconfigured reception will mean that customers, who otherwise may be at risk of digital exclusion, can have supported access to the internet.</p> <p>The plans for the refurbishment are currently underway and we are looking forward to work starting, subject to the availability of building resources during this time, and reopening our doors to the public later on in the summer. Regular updates on progress will soon be reported.</p>
3.	Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie
	I'm sure you will be aware that after a long postponement, parking charges have finally begun at the Pump Room. These charges, unlike previously suggested by the cabinet and councillors, contains no limited free time period.

	<p>a) Could the member explain why there has been a change to the original plan to have an initial 2 hour free period, and whether similar arrangements will be introduced at Albemarle Gate?</p> <p>b) Could the member also explain what they intend to do with the money generated from the parking charges, and does the member expect the new parking charges to effect the amount of people using the park?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>As Councillor Fifield may be aware, the agreed introduction of charges at the Pittville Pump Room car park has not been without its teething problems and we have therefore reviewed feedback from both customers and the Cheltenham Trust who operate the Pittville Pump Room, to try our best to address these.</p> <p>a) We have been operating the car park with an initial two hour free period, but this has given rise to some confusion, as customers were unable to 'top up' their initially chosen stay period if they did not purchase a 4 hour ticket on arrival, but wished to stay longer than originally planned. In addition, the option to 'Pay by Phone' was not available – this is because parking sessions could not then be provided free of charge for the first two hours, as the service itself attracts a minimum 10p charge. The council could potentially have covered this charge, but would then have been incurring costs for all stays up to two hours.</p> <p>Customers, staff and performers at the Pittville Pump Room (PPR) also raised concerns that the previous maximum 4 hour stay period was insufficient and this was giving rise to regular complaints, especially from elderly and/or mobility impaired customers least able to walk from alternative parking locations.</p> <p>The introduction of charges at Albermarle Gate car park is still an option, but has not been implemented to date, whilst paid for parking arrangements are still being adjusted at the PPR site.</p> <p>b) Cllr Fifield may not be aware that car parking charges cannot be introduced with the express intention of generating an income surplus. However, there were a number of reasons for introducing charges at the PPR, including helping to manage congestion and preventing all day and overnight parking by students, residents and visitors.</p> <p>Car parks require regular inspection for health and safety and maintenance purposes, as well as to enforce parking restrictions. This does not come cheaply and neither does the signage, surfacing, planting maintenance, lighting and utilities associated with operating a car park.</p> <p>The introduction of modest parking charges does not appear to have impacted the number of people using the PPR, or those enjoying the high level of public amenity afforded by Pittville Park.</p> <p>I do not anticipate that the charges introduced at PPR will result in an income surplus and this was never the intention. Anyone can use the car park for up</p>

	<p>to an hour for just £1, or can visit free of charge on a Sunday.</p>
4.	<p>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas</p> <p>The recent budget meeting accepted an amendment from the Conservative Group to allocate 50K for Community grants to commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee. Can the cabinet member inform Council when the scheme will be launched and outline the process by which grants be applied for “</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>'As all Councillors will be aware, and as the minutes of the Council meeting confirm, the amendment mentioned in the question by the Conservative Leader was heavily defeated, with only 6 votes in favour.</p> <p>I am sure that all members would not wish to see the Platinum Jubilee turned into a political football. It is therefore disappointing that this question appears to do just that and seek to drive a wedge through what should be a united response.</p> <p>To answer the question in relation to what has been organised, firstly I am sure all members will wish to join me in stating our great appreciation for Her Majesty's commitment and unstinting service to the people of our town, region, country and Commonwealth. She has been, and is, an inspirational leader from whom many others could learn.</p> <p>My thanks to Cllr Jeffries, Cabinet colleagues and officers, for enabling Cheltenham, unlike many other authorities, to have surplus funds available for celebrating the Jubilee. Working with other organisations will enable this funding to create memorable events for communities across Cheltenham.</p> <p>I am pleased to report that the Community Jubilee funds are now live on the council's website.</p> <p>The application criteria has been kept deliberately broad in recognition that good ideas could come from a range of sources including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local communities and third sector organisation • trade and business representative organisations • cultural and creative organisations • local schools and other educational institutions <p>We have also come up with a number of jubilee themes which will help create a legacy for future generations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to bring people together, connecting people to build relationships across generations and our many diverse communities and cultures. • Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help improve local buildings or green spaces • Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help Cheltenham meet its Cheltenham zero carbon target. • Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to help make Cheltenham a place where all our children and young people have the opportunity to thrive • Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to deliver projects that fuse arts, digital

	<p>and heritage innovation to support creative and inclusive communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the opportunity of the Jubilee to support economic activity, supporting local retail areas and bringing people into the town <p>I hope we can all play our role in promoting the jubilee funds and working with our local groups and organisations and give them the encouragement to bid for the funds.</p>
5.	<p>Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries</p> <p>With energy prices now soaring and the longstanding under utilisation of the Municipal offices (since well before the pandemic), how does the Council justify the continued retention of the Muni which is increasingly expensive to heat, light and maintain?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>Thank you, Cllr Nelson, for your question.</p> <p>The Municipal office is an iconic building set in the heart of our town, our stewardship of the building on behalf of the residents of our town I take extremely seriously. Prior to the pandemic this council agreed to the purchase of additional office space, for not only a revenue income but as a potential new home for the council. The question however, in my mind has always been if the council relocates what happens to this iconic building.</p> <p>We as a council and a town have been navigating the recovery from the economic shockwave we received from the pandemic, this undoubtedly has thrown up additional questions that need to be considered in relation to the municipal offices, equally the current cost of living crisis has added another more immediate challenge.</p> <p>To meet this challenge, throughout the budget setting process, work has been ongoing to understand the impact of inflation and rising energy costs on our services and that includes the cost of running the Municipal Offices. We set out our savings strategy within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which was unanimously approved at the February Council meeting. This includes rationalising the space we are using within the Municipal Office by bringing staff currently on the second and third floor down to the first floor. Work has also been carried out to install smart meters throughout the Municipal Offices to allow much closer monitoring of electricity and gas usage and make interventions and improvements to the management of the building in real time.</p> <p>Whilst we are utilising less space in the building, we have also been investing in resource within the property team to increase the capacity to manage and maintain the Municipal building, we are also being financially prudent during these turbulent economic times, and this is expected to generate a base budget saving in 2022/23.</p>
6.	<p>Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie</p> <p>The 2022/23 County Council Budget includes £120k to fund Circular Economy Projects including the establishment of a pilot "Tip Shop" re-use outlet scheme at County Council controlled recycling centres. At a time when we are all encouraged to recycle more, does the Council agree that this could be a beneficial cross-party</p>

	<p>initiative. Would you agree to adopt and trial a similar scheme at the Swindon Road Depot thereby reducing landfill and further supporting current "upcycling" and "repair shop" trends?</p>
	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p>
	<p>Following a budget amendment, I am pleased to say that Gloucestershire County Council did approve £120k capital for a reuse shop at one of the GCC operated household recycling centres and officers are currently planning where, when and how this will be implemented.</p> <p>I think we would all agree that the responsibility for responding to the climate emergency sits with everyone and this sort of initiative supports this. I should also like to remind members that none of the waste collected by us in Cheltenham goes to landfill.</p> <p>In June 2019 Cheltenham Borough Council agreed to invest in its household recycling centre in Swindon Road and officers worked with various 3rd parties to seek to achieve a re-use shop on the site but unfortunately space constraints combined with health and safety issues made this impossible.</p> <p>I am keen to reduce waste and promote re-use, as well as recycling, across the borough and we are currently working with Vision 21 and other 3rd parties to seek to increase re-use across Cheltenham via other more accessible ways for residents whilst ensuring we continue to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>Members may have also seen that we are working with the Butterfly Garden to ensure hard to recycle items such as CD's, DVD's and VHS tapes are recycled. I am also proud to say that our pioneering kerbside coffee pod collection scheme has collected and recycled around 1 million coffee pods already and these have been collected by us at our household recycling centre in Swindon Road for years before this.</p>