

**Council**  
**17 October 2022**

**Public Questions (7 total)**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Question from Caroline Sherwood to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b>
	<p>You may be aware of a lengthy discussion on Next Door community noticeboard regarding the dismay of many members of the community about the loss of our Tourist Information Centre. We have observed the limited space for displaying leaflets in the new 'hub' on the High Street and the fact that the site is very often unattended (it has always been closed when I have walked past). Many people do not use the internet. Tourists in town have been discovered expressing confusion at the lack of a proper TIC, and have even been directed to local facilities and points of interest by members of the public! Many diverse events take place in our rich and varied town which do not get posted to the internet and are advertised by poster or flyer. An allied concern is the inaccessibility for many of the new box office for the Town Hall at Leisure at Cheltenham, Tommy Taylors Lane. Would the Council consider reinstating a staffed centrally located TIC which carries information about all events taking place in town (including the Festivals and those at the Town Hall) with a noticeboard where local groups can post flyers about changing and lively range of events available?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>I'd like to thank the users of Next Door for raising this issue, because it's important that local people have an eye on our town's tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.</p> <p>Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.</p> <p>Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what's on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.</p> <p>The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions.</p> <p>Prior to the pandemic lockdowns, tourist information was housed in The Wilson,</p>

	<p>but that could not be described as a Tourist Information Centre. As part of the successful redesign of The Wilson and the work to boost the local area after the pandemic lockdowns, the decision was taken to place the Visit Cheltenham pod in the High Street - a more central location, hosting a large town map, what's on posters, and free town tourist guides.</p> <p>The initial trial period of the Cheltenham Pod has been extended, but as part of the extension we are rethinking how the Pod can best work for tourists, local community groups and businesses too. As part of this, we are exploring the options for the Pod to be staffed on weekend days from Spring 2023. This approach would give Cheltenham visitors access to tourism information in physical town centre locations seven days per week.</p> <p>Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.</p> <p>The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers.</p> <p>The location of the Cheltenham Trust box office is an operational matter for the Cheltenham Trust. However, the location does not exclude anyone from purchasing tickets for any Cheltenham Trust events or shows. Physical events listings brochures are available and can be posted to anyone interested. The box office ticket line enables people who do not have internet access to purchase tickets via a more traditional method. All tickets can be sent by post or picked up on the door at events, so nobody is excluded. Anyone who wishes to collect tickets ahead of events and is unwilling to use the postal service is of course welcome to pick them up from the box office at Leisure@.</p> <p>Finally, it may be instructive to note that Bath, often held up as an example of best practice in tourism, has closed its Visitor Information Centre.</p>
<p><b>2.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Susan Oscroft to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b></p>
	<p>What plans are there for a Tourist Information Centre in central Cheltenham to replace The Wilson facility? The current booth on the High Street is not compatible with the town's claim to be the centre of Cotswolds tourism.</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p>
	<p>Thank you for the question. It's important that local people have an eye on our town's tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town</p>

from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.

Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.

Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what's on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.

The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions.

Prior to the pandemic lockdowns, tourist information was housed in The Wilson, but that could not be described as a Tourist Information Centre. As part of the successful redesign of The Wilson and the work to boost the local area after the pandemic lockdowns, the decision was taken to place the Visit Cheltenham pod in the High Street - a more central location, hosting a large town map, what's on posters, and free town tourist guides.

The initial trial period of the Cheltenham Pod has been extended, but as part of the extension we are rethinking how the Pod can best work for tourists, local community groups and businesses too. As part of this, we are exploring the options for the Pod to be staffed on weekend days from Spring 2023. This approach would give Cheltenham visitors access to tourism information in physical town centre locations seven days per week.

Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.

The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers.

Finally, it may be instructive to note that Bath, often held up as an example of best practice in tourism, has closed its Visitor Information Centre.

**3. Question from Jim Markland to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Sometime ago Cheltenham very understandably declared itself to be the "Festival Town". As life returns to normal post covid it seems time that Cheltenham

“walked the talk”, lived up to its ambitions and prepared to properly welcome visitors to the Festivals and the town. As such it is worthwhile thinking of what a visitor might seek out and would appreciate.

Looking at this from my own experience I would suggest a focal point where visitors (and residents!) could obtain assistance with such as the following:

- Late accommodation availability
- Transport local and national
- Parking
- Cycle hire and routes
- Maps and directions including bus routes
- Restaurants/Bars
- Shopping
- Travel tickets such as National Express
- Local walks and points of interest including guided walks
- Local History
- Tickets for events such as all at Cheltenham Theatres
- First Class Public Toilets

At the moment it seems to me that the provision for visitors to the town is sadly lacking, yet we all know too well how useful it is to have such facilities available when visiting any tourist destination, and how much better it is to be able to talk to a well-informed local person than to depend on a computer search.

A centrally located properly functioning tourist information supported by a welcome team (and potentially local societies) cannot fail to be an improvement on the status quo.

Please could Cheltenham Borough Council explain their policy and plans with regard to such services?

**Response from Cabinet Member**

Thank you for the question. It’s important that local people have an eye on our town’s tourism marketing activities. I can confirm that we are currently working on plans to reintroduce a seven day a week tourism information offer to the town from Spring 2023, in time for the new tourist season.

Tourism information is currently available from Monday to Friday in the revamped Municipal Offices reception, in a staffed area of the council building, a central part of the town.

Visitors and residents are welcome to visit the reception area at the Municipal Offices between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, (10am to 5pm Wednesday) where maps and town guides are available. Digital screens share up to date information on what’s on and where to go in Cheltenham, and printed tourist information is available to collect.

	<p>The Municipal Offices reception also hosts two telephones alongside two self-service PCs which can be used to find tourist information on the Visit Cheltenham website, or to book tickets for local attractions. Anyone seeking information on the matters you have raised in your question will be able to use these terminals and though it will not be possible to buy physical tickets from this location, tickets will be available from the relevant outlet, whether that is Cheltenham Festivals, the Everyman Theatre, at Cheltenham Trust venue or a transport provider.</p> <p>Prior to the pandemic lockdowns, tourist information was housed in The Wilson, but that could not be described as a Tourist Information Centre. As part of the successful redesign of The Wilson and the work to boost the local area after the pandemic lockdowns, the decision was taken to place the Visit Cheltenham pod in the High Street - a more central location, hosting a large town map, what's on posters, and free town tourist guides.</p> <p>The initial trial period of the Cheltenham Pod has been extended, but as part of the extension we are rethinking how the Pod can best work for tourists, local community groups and businesses too. As part of this, we are exploring the options for the Pod to be staffed on weekend days from Spring 2023. This approach would give Cheltenham visitors access to tourism information in physical town centre locations seven days per week.</p> <p>Promoting Cheltenham as a place to visit is one of our most important priorities. But it's also important to highlight that nationally many local areas have moved away from traditional tourist information centres to alternatives. This particularly includes online channels, given that 84 per cent of British adults have a smartphone and will typically use Google or other search engines to find information.</p> <p>The council has invested in Marketing Cheltenham to promote the town to visitors with a successful website and social media accounts too. In 2021, the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million page views, with more than 50,000 people following on social media and 20,000 online newsletter subscribers. All of the information referenced in the question is available on the Visit Cheltenham digital platforms and that is the most appropriate place for accessing such information.</p> <p>Finally, it may be instructive to note that Bath, often held up as an example of best practice in tourism, has closed its Visitor Information Centre.</p>
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Anne Regan to Cabinet Member, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b></p>
	<p>It is with great dismay when attending the Museum in Clarence Street I learnt that the Tourist Information Desk was no longer in use and had been moved to a kiosk in the High street.</p> <p>When visiting the kiosk on several occasions it was unmanned with only a few</p>

	<p>paper leaflets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Why have you closed down one of national industries big earners for towns and cities?</li> <li>b) Are you aware of the loss of income to our town and has that loss been calculated?</li> <li>c) How are visitors able to book various location visits in the Cotswolds without a TIO?</li> <li>d) How are visitors able to find their way around Cheltenham and book venues?</li> <li>e) With the evolving loss of shops etc why is a TIO not relevant to this administration?</li> </ul>
<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>	
	<p>Thank you to former councillor Regan for her question. It is good to hear from her and I'm sorry to learn of her dismay. I can understand that for the majority of her long and dedicated service to this Borough the world will have been a different place and a traditional Tourist Information Centre would have been the default approach. In 2022, local authorities must bridge the gap between providing tourism information for people in the way in which most people expect: online, and physical tourism information. We accept that physical tourist information is still required for those who cannot access the internet via a smart phone during visits. That is why this authority is moving to an arrangement to provide tourism information as described in answers to questions 1 to 3. Despite the detail in my earlier answers, I am happy to provide answers to the five questions posed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The council has not "closed down one of national industries big earners for towns and cities", as former councillor Regan suggests. Tourism Information Centres typically make a loss.</li> <li>b) This is not calculable, though the premise of the question is rejected because there is no evidence. Indeed, in 2021 the Visit Cheltenham website received 2.2million visits. I would suggest that this is significantly more annual visitors than any Tourist Information Centre that Cheltenham has ever had.</li> <li>c) Via the providers directly. This will mostly happen via online bookings, but alternative modes of communication are available.</li> <li>d) To navigate Cheltenham, Google Maps would probably be the default app for the 84 per cent of the population who have access to a smart phone (other map apps are available). For those without access to the internet, Visit Cheltenham supplies free paper tear-off maps to various tourist and visitor destinations around Cheltenham. Anyone wishing to book a venue would typically contact that venue directly by phone, email or in person. Sending a letter or a social media message might also be an option. One of the marvels of the modern world is that we have access to multiple modes of communication.</li> <li>e) The retail environment has indeed been impacted by a number of factors, including changing consumer habits, the government's failure to reform the broken business rates system and high rents for commercial properties. The coming cost of living crisis will undoubtedly provide further challenges.</li> </ul>

	<p>Former councillor Regan will be interested to note that this authority is working with Cheltenham BID and a respected retail consultant to fill empty shops. Enforcement action will be taken against empty premises which have been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. The TIO element of this question has clearly been superseded by answers elsewhere.</p> <p>Noting the general theme of her question, I am sure former councillor Regan will be pleased to read the detailed answers to other questions, which deal directly with the substantive matter of tourism information.</p>
<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Anne Regan to Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Victoria Atherstone</b></p>
	<p>a) How many empty properties are there in Cheltenham Town Centre above retail premises?</p> <p>b) Has the Council approached any of the landlords and how many?</p> <p>c) Has the Council considered the number of homes that could be provided by conversion?</p> <p>d) Has the Council sought funding streams from outside bodies for financially covering conversions?</p> <p>e) Has the Council a timeline for this type of project?</p>
	<p>Thank you Anne for your questions about trying to identify more potential residential property in our town centre above retail premises.</p> <p>In partnership with the Cheltenham BID, the Council is currently working on a programme, approaching retail property landlords to address empty retail units in the town centre. This activity will include a review of the current status of empty shops in key streets, as well as business engagement and potential enforcement action by the Council against landlords who do not ensure their premises are well-maintained. It will also lead to work to promote vacancies to encourage new retailers and businesses to move to the town centre.</p> <p>We have also fairly recently conducted a review to identify how many long-term vacant residential properties above retail premises there are in the town centre area, this currently stands at ten.</p> <p>Some years ago, the Council did offer financial assistance through grant aid to help landlords of retail properties, convert living spaces above their property. Unfortunately the take-up was very low and not purely down to the unwillingness of the landlords but also due to structural barriers such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fire safety due the design of such buildings</li> <li>• lack of shop flexibility associated with storage capacity</li> <li>• security concerns</li> <li>• heritage constraints associated with separate access to the residential accommodation</li> </ul>

	<p>Although there are such barriers in many cases, there is also always scope to find more opportunities to work with landlords to provide such accommodation.</p> <p>It is also worth noting, the Council is currently working on a programme through the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Strategic Plan, to assess the urban capacity of the borough; this includes opportunities across the town centre and will assess the future development needs of our area. Including highlighting the possible need for more town centre residential accommodation, as we do not currently know the number of retail premises capable of conversion to provide such accommodation.</p> <p>After the conclusion of this programme of work, the Council may seek opportunities to secure similar funding streams, as we did before, from outside bodies to help retail landlords cover some of the costs for such conversions.</p>
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Dr Cook to Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, Councillor Flo Clucas</b></p>
	<p>I am pleased to see the council has been using the “No child left behind” public health informed approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable children. The council will be aware that people are said to be experiencing fuel poverty when they cannot afford to heat their home to a reasonable temperature. Before the pandemic, over 13% of all households in England (3.2 million households) were living in fuel poverty, according to government figures. The British Medical Journal reports that “children growing up in cold, damp, and mouldy homes with inadequate ventilation have higher than average rates of respiratory infections and asthma, chronic ill health, and disability. They are also more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and slower physical growth and cognitive development.” Most families will face significant adversity this winter, due to inflation, rising housing costs &amp; rising energy prices. In particular, the government’s plans for real terms cut in benefits, will affect poorer families the most. Therefore, the council will be aware that many people in Cheltenham will be very likely to experience significant risks to their health, placing more burden on the NHS, and we can expect a large rise in the number of people, including families, being at risk of, and becoming homeless. In view of these major risks, I surmise that the insufficient action by the council, having at this stage, only offered people advice on keeping warm, the council is complicit in harming children, who will be exposed to fuel poverty &amp; its consequences, and therefore it appears the council has abandoned the No Child Left Behind Approach. In order to continue the good work of the council, especially to protect the most vulnerable this winter, will the council commit to further work on its “Cost of Living Emergency” declaration in July 2022, in particular, will the council use existing networks to promote sources of support for vulnerable people &amp; families, including promoting the council’s ability to take enforcement action on inadequate private rentals, will the council make such promotion more accessible, such as posters, leaflets, and talks, via schools, social services, GP surgeries, public transport and the library? Will all councillors commit to giving some of their time to educate the communities within their local wards?</p>



## Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for your question Dr Cook

Whilst there is much within your question with which I agree, I would like to go through some of the work that has been done both by the Council and with our partners in order to reassure you that the Council remains very much committed to both No Child Left Behind and to supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. The link to the council report recommitting to NCLB in March 2022.

[https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s39665/2022\\_03\\_21\\_COU\\_No\\_Child\\_Left\\_Behind.pdf](https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s39665/2022_03_21_COU_No_Child_Left_Behind.pdf)

As a reminder, No Child Left Behind, which was begun some four years ago, is a local partnership that is working to:

- Raise awareness of the issue of child poverty;
- Address the inequality gap through events and activities; and
- Work together to make transformational change over the longer-term.

The No Child Left Behind Partnership is incredibly strong. We have built a town-wide coalition of like-minded partners who are determined to take action so that all our children have the opportunity to thrive. To date 24 schools have signed up alongside 57 organisations including 16 businesses.

No Child Left Behind works closely with local schools, both with our primary schools through the Cheltenham Learning Partnership and secondary schools through Cheltenham Education Partnership. Both our laptops for learning programme and our holiday activity schemes have reached out to every school in Cheltenham.

Through No Child Left Behind we have successfully run the Government holiday activity and food programmes for local children on free school meals with 778 children attending, 1034 activity sessions provided directly by No Child Left Behind and many more children reached by partner organisations. In addition 2,000 food hampers were made available through the HAF programme to children and families over the summer holidays thanks to #FeedCheltenham Partners.

Under the banner of No Child Left Behind, the council has worked extensively with our community food network, #feedcheltenham, to make sure that our children and indeed our families are able to access warm spaces this winter.

All our community food providers have seen significant increases in the number of customers they are seeing. But this increase in demand comes at a time when both the cost to them of food and energy is rising and the amount of food being donated is dropping off leading to a cash squeeze on their finances – we have estimated that this gap equates to £2k per week across four community food pantries.

In response, the council has agreed financial support worth £65k which have gone to seven community food providers. These grants will help support the organisational resilience of these community food providers and recognise the hard work that is being done to alleviate the cost of living crisis faced by our local residents.

In addition, to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis, we are working with our community food providers we are about to launch a campaign called #warmcheltenham. This will have three elements:

- A network of warm spaces that people can drop into keep warm if they can't afford to heat their homes during the day. So far 7 community venues have come on board but more are being encouraged to join-up. A campaign called donate the rebate to encourage more affluent people in receipt of the £400 energy rebate to donate this to the warmcheltenham campaign.
- An advice leaflet that will be pushed out via community centres, libraries, schools and GP practices

We use Household Support Fund which is DWP money channelled via GCC to districts to ensure financial support gets to those that are most vulnerable in our communities. We are using this to support a range of community partners – see below.

Provider	Household Support Fund Activity	allocation
#feedcheltenham	Supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens	50,175
Cheltenham Children Centres	Household items (eg cleaning / toiletries) for vulnerable families with under 5s, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	21,262.5
Food Bank - energy vouchers	Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers provision via Cheltenham Food Bank, CCP and Springbank	52,537.5
CHEP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	11,700
CCP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	11,700

Citizen's advice	Clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	2475
		149,850

I agree with you Dr Cook that the issue in relation to health is significant and that's why we work with health partners also. Working with NHS partners, we have recently devised and launched a grant scheme that offers grants of up to £10k for community-based organisations to support individuals or communities that face health inequalities that are likely to have been worsened by the pandemic and/or the cost of living crisis.

In addition, through Heads Up we are working extensively with our partners to try to ensure that mental health issues are kept at a minimum and have just initiated a cross sector task group to research the lived experience of young people to investigate concerns including eating disorders, abuse on social media platforms and anxiety around the future. This will support further partnership work to help our young people during this very challenging time.

I hope this response makes it clear that this council is very much committed to supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis and that this commitment includes our officers and, with a nod to your last question, all my councillor colleagues who will be working tirelessly to support their local residents.

**7. Question from Dr Cook to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

In light of the report by the Liberal Democrat National Party Standards Office, which found Mayor Sandra Holliday guilty of bullying, and suspended her membership of the Party for 12 months, will the Leader of the Council inform the people of Cheltenham, whether the Leader of the Council believes Councillor Holliday's position as Mayor of Cheltenham, and Councillor for St Mark's Ward, is compatible with the Nolan Principles, "to treat all persons fairly and with respect" and to "lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role" when Councillor Holliday has been determined to have acted as a bully and a racist by her own Party?

**Response from Cabinet Member**

Good afternoon Dr Cook  
As your Question is directed to the Leader of the council I am responding in that position. The matter that you refer to was dealt with by the National Liberal Democrat Party I am not privy to the complaint in detail, I have been informed of the outcome namely that Councillor Holliday is suspended from being a member of the party for a period of 12 months. The national party will I am certain have had the Nolan Principles at the forefront of their minds in coming to the conclusion that they did.