

Cabinet

8 November 2022

Public Question (1 total)

1.	Question from Tess Beck to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson
	<p>In 2014 Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) set up the Cheltenham Trust as a charitable trust to deliver culture and leisure services on behalf of the council and to manage some of the council's most significant public buildings. The specification for the council's contract with the Trust was very detailed including what services the Trust would deliver, who would fund what, who was liable for what. And it was almost entirely public.</p> <p>In April 2022 CBC Cabinet agreed a new specification with the Trust and this agreement and the review was entirely restricted. Although a restriction of some of the financial information contained within the review may be justified, I fail to understand the reasoning for restricting the whole of the review and revised specification, given the level of public interest.</p> <p>Given that the Cheltenham Trust is charged with delivering a number of the council's strategic priorities on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council (including helping people in Cheltenham live healthier, fulfilling and active lives, inspiring people in Cheltenham to take part in and gain valuable skills and experiences, and promote Cheltenham as a world class place to live, work, study and visit), there should be a greater level of transparency. Any argument to maintain the exemption is likely to be outweighed by the public interest in the information being disclosed. We can infer the Trust has been relieved of some responsibilities (e.g. the duty to provide tourist information services) but why can this not be made explicit?</p> <p>Can the Cabinet members and officers responsible for the report and revised specification undertake to review the documentation with a view to making as much of the information as possible public in the interests of transparency?</p>
	Response from Cabinet Member
	<p>Thank you Tess for bringing this question to Cabinet.</p> <p>I am a firm believer that the council should be as open and as transparent as possible, including in its relationships with its commissioned providers who are delivering services on behalf of the council.</p>

You are correct in saying that when the report came to cabinet earlier this year to seek approval for the updated specification, it was restricted and therefore members of the public were unable to see some details. This was because the covering report did contain some financial information that we did not wish to be put in the public domain.

However, the specification itself, which sets out the council's specific requirements for how the agreed services will be delivered, does not contain any financial information.

I have liaised with officers and also sought legal advice and I am happy that we will now place the current specification (as agreed by Cabinet on 5 April, prior to the date on which I took over this portfolio) in the public domain.

I will do this via a delegated cabinet member decision and as such it will be published on the council's democracy pages as a decision.

I fully intend that the paperwork will be made publicly available by Friday 18 November.