

Council

Meeting date: 12 December 2022

Public Questions (2 total)

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

Between April 2019 and March 2022, Cheltenham Borough Council paid leasing costs for the mayor's car of £14 439, with a further £1079 spent on fuel. This is the highest amount paid by any council in the South West. If the leasing costs had not been paid, we could have paid for 6275 children to have hot meals in the coming Christmas Holidays. How can the council justify spending so much on leasing costs for the car, when council finances are so limited, and whilst many Cheltenham residents are sat in cold homes, and struggling to feed themselves or their children?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for the question. We are proud of the work that the Mayor of Cheltenham does to support civic life in Cheltenham. While the global pandemic has impacted Mayoral engagements in 2020 and 2021, in a typical year the Mayor attends hundreds of engagements, sometimes 3 or 4 in the same day. Firstly it is not realistic to use public transport for the Mayor's schedule as the bus services, which are the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council, are neither reliable nor frequent enough. Secondly, the Mayor wears a chain of historical significant and heritage value, therefore retaining a car is preferable for safety.

It is also important to remember that a key part of the role of Mayor is to raise money for their chosen charities. Over the last ten years £195k has been raised for local good causes doing absolutely essential and valuable work in our communities. Therefore the cost of leasing a car should be offset against the funds raised which are far in excess of the annual cost of leasing a green and sustainable car.

One of the Mayor's charities for this year is #feedcheltenham which directly helps people who are struggling to feed themselves and their families. I hope the Mayor succeeds in raising as much money for this essential cause as possible during these difficult and challenging times.

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

I have, twice, been unable to copy & paste my question to the council into the online form, which means this form is inaccessible for users of assistive technology, and the website does not contain an accessibility statement. I have contacted the helpdesk regarding this matter and was told I needed to type my question onto the online form, however if I was using a speech to text device, this would not have been

possible. Therefore I find that people with disabilities are being discriminated in their access to the democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk website. When will the council bring the democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk in line with The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 ?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you for your question. Our web team has tested our 'Submit a public question' form and has successfully copied and pasted text into the form so cannot identify with the issue raised.

With regard to the [council's accessibility statement](#), this is available on our main website Cheltenham.gov.uk and you'll find links to it in the website header and footer. We thank you for highlighting that it is not apparent on the democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk, so we'll look at improving this as a priority.

Our web team is currently working with an external organisation called The Shaw Trust, who are experts in the field of accessibility, to bring our website in line with the accessibility legislation. This work is nearing completion, but work to improve accessibility will always be ongoing. We have recently produced an accessibility policy which is aimed at ensuring the continued improvement of our online platforms.