

Council

Meeting date: 20 March 2023

Public Questions (4 total)

1. Question from Mike Farmer to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Voter ID costs

I note that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has allocated 'new burdens' funding to Cheltenham Borough Council for the costs of introducing Voter ID Ref [New Burdens Funding Allocations 22/23 and 23/24: voter ID, accessibility, training & contact centre costs \(England and Wales\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), and that these allocations total £7,610 (£4,750 for Financial Year 2022/23 and £2,860 for Financial Year 2023/24).

Could the Cabinet member for Finance and Assets state:

- Whether these allocations are sufficient to cover the Council's costs, during these two financial years, associated with preparing for the introduction of Voter ID in local and general elections scheduled to be held in Cheltenham in the financial year 2024/25?
- What additional funding the Council would require to cover the costs of Voter ID requirements if a general election were to be called during the 2023/24 financial year?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you Mr Farmer for your questions: It is fair to say that under normal conditions, cost recovery for elections are well practiced. Adding the requirement of voter ID gives a variable that all local authorities will be grappling with, the outcome of which, financially, will not be known until after each election.

The New Burdens funding is being provided using a hybrid approach of upfront grant payments, Justification Led Bids and a combination of both. The upfront grants are a proportion of the funding available. The upfront grant for Cheltenham (£4,750 for Financial Year 2022/23 and £2,860 for Financial Year 2023/24) has been calculated based on the fact that we do not have any scheduled elections for May 2023 and we do not have a large number of polling stations. Should the upfront grant funding not be sufficient to cover the councils costs then the Justification Led Bid process will allow additional funding to be released retrospectively. Funding for the financial year 2024/25 will follow the same pattern, with the first payment awarded via upfront grant in April 2024, followed by the JLB process.

Costs incurred for UK Parliamentary elections as a result of the Elections Act will be met by the Consolidated Fund, rather than the New Burdens funding. In the event that an early election is called during the financial year 23/24, should there be any costs arising, above the grants already awarded, because of voter ID requirements they would be met through this process.

2. Question from Rich Newman to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

As the council has now agreed to spend £25,000 to light a part of the park, are there any plans in place to light the rest of Sandford Park? Namely the Eastern side of the park between college road and Keynsham Road? As the petition clearly asked for the entirety of the park to be lit. And your current plans only cover about a 3rd of Sandford Parks paved area.

Response from Cabinet Member

The Council has been working with Gloucestershire County Council to assess and suggest improvements to lighting in Sandford Park. The recommendation is to upgrade the lighting along the cycle path between College Road and Barretts Mill Lane, replacing two columns with five at closer spacing. An additional column is also proposed near the friendship circle, with an additional one under consideration in the Anney (High Street) Garden. The cost to undertake this is between £25k - £28K. Potential funding sources have been identified (including £3k from GCC) and will be subject to funding bids for which applications are currently being prepared in partnership with the Friends of Sandford Park; who support this approach.

There are no plans to extend the lighting to all of the park, as it was identified in the report that this was not necessary and could be quite damaging to wildlife having a quite negative impact on bio diversity.

3. Question from Peter Frings to the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, Councillor Mike Collins

Clean Air Cheltenham has circulated, to all councillors, on Monday 13th March, a document summarising the huge benefits Nottingham City Council have gained from implementing a Workplace Parking Levy 10 years ago. Many other councils - both unitary and non-unitary (e.g. Oxford) - are also implementing a Workplace Parking Levy scheme. Nottingham Council have confirmed that they can deliver a full feasibility study to explore the benefits of such a scheme in Cheltenham, at a cost of £25k. Can the Cabinet Member responsible confirm that Cheltenham Borough Council will commission such a feasibility study within the next 6 months?

Response from Cabinet Member

I would like to thank Mr Frings for his question; one which was recently raised via the councils budget consultation 2023/24. In response to that and reflected again here, the Workplace Parking Levy functions by allowing revenues to be invested in transport schemes, offsetting the impact on businesses. In my view this could only

be efficiently introduced and implemented by the highways and transport authority, Gloucestershire County Council who are the decision makers in respect of highways.

I am aware of the legislation that enables this levy, but also of the wider challenges, particularly at a time of ever increasing financial pressures on businesses and individuals. The contribution of this type of intervention to a wider modal shift strategy may play a future role but this is a consideration alongside all possible future interventions. I am not in a position to commit the Council to funding a feasibility study, but I am happy to commit to raising the question with my county council colleagues.

4. Question from Peter Frings to the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, Councillor Mike Collins

If the council is not willing to explore the potential benefits of a Workplace Parking Levy, by what other means does the council propose to raise the major investment needed to start the process of building a continental standard, sustainable transport system in Cheltenham... without which it is very difficult to see how there will ever be any significant improvement in Cheltenham's air quality?

Response from Cabinet Member

Again, thank you Mr Frings for your question. I have addressed a similar question in respect of the members questions posed to me today. Gloucestershire County Council is the highways authority and therefore our role is one of campaigning on our priorities and seeking to work in collaboration. Data from our recent residents' survey noted that 68% of residents will choose to walk, cycle or use public transport more instead of using a car in the next few years.

As you rightly point out addressing transport, which is one of the key contributors to air quality and climate change impacts is a priority. Through our work on Connecting Cheltenham we set out our ambitious vision for transport to help tackle the climate change emergency, enable inclusive transport options and make better connections across the borough. This work remains relevant and continues to guide our engagement with the County Council.