

Council

Meeting date: 25 July 2023

Member Questions (4 total)

1. Question from Councillor Julian Tooke to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

It has been suggested in the press, on the strength of a comment of a member of this council, that Cheltenham might lose its 'spa status' because the Pittville Pump Room waters are not drinkable at present. Please can the cabinet member confirm whether it is possible for a settlement to 'lose spa status' and whether that is a risk to this town. As the member for Pittville where the Pump Room is located, my concern is that these rumours and the associated negative publicity is to the detriment of the town's brand image and massively important tourism sector.

Response from Cabinet Member

I was surprised to read the media coverage about the 'risk' that Cheltenham might 'lose its spa town status'. The initial report seems to have been written on the strength of speculation to the press by a member of this council. I'm sure that all of us consider our duties as members before we pass comment and that the member in question did not intend to cause difficulties for the town or needless alarm to local residents.

Officers have investigated this matter and I have personally taken part in the information-gathering activities. This Council is not aware of any process, committee or organisation that could take away Cheltenham's 'spa town status'. We have checked this with Historic England, which confirmed our view. I am therefore happy to reassure Cllr Tooke, all members of this council and local residents that Cheltenham cannot lose its 'spa town status'. As part of my investigations, I recently visited Harrogate, which was a spa town long before Cheltenham. Harrogate's Spa water has not been available to drink since 2012 due to safety issues. Harrogate is still marketed as a spa town. I have appended pictures for members.



Following other questions from local residents and members of this council, I have asked officers whether the source from which the Pump Room water is drawn, is contaminated as a result of the well-publicised national sewage dumping scandal. This scandal has included raw sewage being allowed to flow into the Hatherley Brook and River Chelt. It is my understanding that sewage dumping in rivers is unlikely to be the cause of the contamination of the spa water under the Pittville Pump Room.

Work is on-going to address the safety issues with Cheltenham's water and members will receive an update in due course. In the meantime, I would urge all members to seek advice from officers of this council before engaging in speculation which might harm this town's tourism industry and the very many hospitality businesses that benefit from tourism spend.

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

I was recently in Bath and was impressed by their efforts to combat urban gulls which upset many residents in Cheltenham.

One practical measure that they have adopted is to install "Belly Bins" which can be opened to dispose of waste and then closed, preventing the gulls from getting at the contents of bin. The bins were in the city and in the conservation area.

Will the cabinet member examine the feasibility of installing such bins in Cheltenham possibly in a phased programme to ease cost?

Response from Cabinet Member

I'd like to thank Cllr Harman for his question. A number of bin trials are currently underway to assess the effectiveness of various designs.

Cllr Harman rightfully highlights that Big Belly bins have been deployed in various urban locations across the country. The bins are not always installed to combat urban gulls but rather they are mostly deployed in high footfall areas where traditional high street bins fill up quickly. It is reported that Big Belly bins can hold up to 8 times the waste of a normal bin due to the fact that they contain compaction mechanisms to compress the waste. The bins use solar panels and are connected to wifi to send a message to street teams to indicate when they need to be emptied. This has the potential to create efficiencies for street cleansing teams who have to empty the bins less often. Due to these features these types of bins can be 5-10 times more expensive (costing thousands per unit) than a regular high street bin.

In some areas these bins have also prompted some negative feedback from users claiming that the technology/compaction can fail and they are unhygienic to use due to the fact that the user has to touch and open the handle of the bin to use it. This has resulted in some user's merely depositing waste on the top or to the side of the bin – which can risk exacerbating any issues with litter and potentially leave more

food waste available for urban gulls. In addition, as the bins are more complex, this can mean they are more complicated and costly to fix if things do go wrong.

This Council, in partnership with Ubico, continue to work hard to look at ways of improving the service and this will always include reviewing our street bins particularly when they are due for replacement. As the responsible cabinet member, I have over the past year taken a particular interest in the design of waste bins, from Uppsala to Ullswater and I will be inputting my own views into our bin replacement review to ensure we have the right bins to meet our needs.

We will continue to consider modern or newer technology, such as big belly bins, but as set out above, decisions on what product to go with and what is best and most effective for Cheltenham requires consideration of a number of factors and trying to make comparisons with other localities is not always a good indicator of how a product will perform in Cheltenham. It is only by trialling a product that we can truly test and assess performance. This is something that the Council will keep under review and if an opportunity arises to trial a big belly bin in a cost effective way then the council will be happy to consider it.

3. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

I understand that residents, certainly in Charlton Kings, received notification through their doors on July 4th that they need to sort recycling even more. They will now have up to 6 different containers to put out on alternate Thursdays (Blue bag, **green boxes x 3**, food recycling and brown garden waste brown bin!).

I know many residents have limited storage space for the various recycling containers and already find it difficult to manage their current number of boxes/bins.

Ubico used to collect green and brown bins in the same week which made things easier but that changed so they are alternate weeks, and the garden recycling is the same week as the rest of the recycling - hence 6 containers!

Is this a trial or is it applicable across the town?

Response from Cabinet Member

I'd like to thank Cllr Nelson for the question. I can confirm that this is not a trial. An information leaflet was sent to residents to remind them of the bank holiday collections, opening hours for the Household Recycling Centre (HRC) and providing useful recycling tips. Residents have been asked where possible to keep our crews safe from any broken glass and if they have the space available, to use an extra box, one for paper and one for glass. If not, they can continue to separate glass and paper within one box, with paper on the bottom, as crews do need to have visibility of any glass that is broken.

With regard to how we operate waste and recycling collections in partnership with Ubico, we plan all of our vehicles rounds and crews in the most efficient way we can to minimise the cost to the taxpayer. And by planning efficient collection rounds we keep carbon emissions and fuel usage also to a minimum.

We ask residents to sort their recycling because this also has a big impact on the overall service. If the recyclate is sorted well, this can reduce the time it takes to collect. Reducing the collection time for each property by only a few seconds can save a lot of time when this is multiplied across 1000s of collections per day. Reducing collection time also helps to reduce vehicle idling, which reduces fuel use, emissions, is more beneficial for air quality and helps reduce costs. The shorter the idling time of vehicles also helps to keep traffic moving. Separating recyclate also improves the quality of what is collected which helps it to be more attractive to the onward market.

With specific regard to Garden Waste, this is a paid for service and, again, by keeping the service as efficient as possible we ensure that we are reducing the impact of vehicles and are not passing these costs back to the customer.

While we understand that, for some residents, having a number of receptacles does put pressure on space this has to be balanced against the most cost effective way of collecting waste and recycling that keeps any environmental impact to a minimum.

4. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

There are currently several job vacancies for positions within CBC, some at a fairly senior level. For example, those recently advertised on CBC Facebook:-

19 & 29 June - Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance and Head of Policy and Placemaking

20 June - Revenues and Benefits Apprentice

21 June - Construction Project Manager and Commercial Manager

19 May – HR Coordinator, Community Safety Apprentice, Park Ranger Apprentice, Finance Apprentice, Estates Surveyor, Environmental Health Officer (Food Safety), Visitor Welcome Assistant

I appreciate some of these may now have been filled.

How many vacancies are there currently across CBC, what are the positions and what are the terms (hours & pay) please?

Response from the Leader

Thank you for your questions and please find below an update on the vacancies you have highlighted:

Head of Development Management, Enforcement & Compliance & Head of Policy & Placemaking – these roles have been short-listed and the interviewing process is currently underway.

Apprentices: Assessment day and interviews for our Finance Apprentice, Revenues & Benefits Apprentice and Park Ranger Apprentice will be taking place during w/c 24th July. We have filled the Community & ASB Apprentice role.

Construction Project Manager and Commercial Manager – these have been short-listed and interviews are currently taking place.

We have filled the HR Co-ordinator, Estates Surveyor, Environmental Health Officer (Food Safety) & Visitor Welcome Assistant vacancies.

We currently have one vacancy to be advertised for a full-time Finance HRBP, at an annual salary of between £44,012 - £49,332, a vacancy in our Revenues & Benefits team and one in our Customer Services team. There are other vacancies within our establishment but with our organisational phase 2 taking place, these are currently under review. Full terms and conditions for our roles are set out in the advert and are also available from our website.

- Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).
- 25 days rising to 30 days after five years.
- A flexible and agile working environment - opportunities to work from home or elsewhere and flexibility in working hours.
- Two days paid time off for volunteering.
- An employee assistance programme
- A cycle to work scheme.
- Low cost town centre parking.
- A commitment to employee wellbeing.