

Cabinet

24 September 2024

Public Questions (2 total)

1. Question from Mr David Redgewell to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm

Cheltenham Spa is a town with many disabled residents and visitors, with the National Star College and two University of Gloucester campuses also based in the town.

Under the 2010 Equalities Act the council has a public sector equality duty to protect people with protected characteristics (including race, religion, age, pregnancy and maternity leave, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and disability) using public services, as consumers or when buying or renting property.

Many council services and contracts are failing to look at or understand the public sector equality duty of Cheltenham Borough Council. Ranging from council bins being placed on kerbs or blocking the bus stop in Arle Road by the Territorial Army Centre, to emergency signage being out of date on the disabled toilets opposite Royal Well Bus and Coach Station, and to former Cheltenham Borough Homes staff having little training on protected characteristics in social and affordable housing.

The council needs to work more closely with Gloucestershire County Council on the quality of the public realm in Cheltenham Spa. Other councils in southwest England have directors or officers who provide equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training within the council and oversee services to residents, and visitors to the borough, district or county.

When will Cheltenham Borough Council look at employing or appointing a Council Director with responsibility for EDI and consider employment of an EDI officer within the authority or through a shared post with Gloucester City Council or Tewkesbury Borough Council (North Gloucestershire Borough Council)?

Cabinet Member Response

Thank you for your question Mr Redgewell.

The council is passionate about ED&I and this is evidenced in the work we do. All policies and service changes require completion of an Equality Impact Assessment which provides relevant ED&I information to ensure that decisions take EDI factors into account. You will see examples of these appended to the reports we are considering today.

Our employee group, led by the Director of Governance and Customer Services, meets regularly and is currently reviewing the council's ED&I policy and action plan. These documents were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 26 February 2024 and are now out for public consultation. You can view the draft policy and action plan on our [website](#) and submit your comments by emailing equalities@cheltenham.gov.uk

Whilst we do not have an officer with equalities in their job title we believe that ED&I is the responsibility of all officers and elected members and should be considered as part of everything we do. I recently spent the morning with a ward resident to understand their accessibility issues in part of the town, so I can better support their request for change from Gloucestershire County Council – and this is something we should always strive to do so we can ensure our town keeps moving forward.

2. Question from Mr David Redgewell to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control

Within Cheltenham Borough Council's joint local plan with Gloucestershire County Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council (North Gloucestershire Borough Council), and Gloucester City Council, there appears to be a shortage of accessible housing, especially within Cheltenham Spa.

With disabled young people leaving college and universities in the borough and more older people in the community, how will Cheltenham Borough Council and its new housing department deal with and provide more accessible homes with wheelchair access in areas with good drop kerbs and walking and wheeling routes to services and public transport to meet this urgent housing need.

Cabinet Member Response

Thank you Mr Redgewell for your question which is very timely as we work to prepare the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan (SLP).

Looking at ways we can raise accessibility standards for new homes is an important consideration. For many people the important features in a home are around things like location, size and affordability, but for older people and those with disabilities the accessibility of their home is paramount and contributes to both general wellbeing and being able to live an active and independent life.

As noted in a 2023 [government research briefing](#) on UK disability statistics "The prevalence of disability rises with age: around 11% of children were disabled, compared with 23% of working age adults and 45% of adults over State Pension age". In preparing the SLP, we are assessing all housing needs and how we plan for these but recognising the importance of suitable homes for older people and those with disabilities, particularly in light of our demographics which clearly demonstrates an ageing population means that any benefits built into new homes

around accessibility will support not just today's population, but also generations to come.

As we review the policies for the SLP, the team is, within the context of housing needs overall, exploring the most effective policy mechanisms for securing more accessible homes through the planning system, for both market and affordable tenures. I have alerted the SLP team and Housing Enabling Officer to the very important points you have raised through this question and to consider ways we can more explicitly build accessibility outcomes into our emerging policies. I would encourage you to take part in future engagements and consultations on the SLP and encourage you to review the [SLP website](#) and sign up to the consultation portal to be alerted of future activities for consultation.

From a housing perspective, the council's negotiations via our Housing Enabling Officer always seek to provide appropriate, accessible, affordable housing as set out within the local evidence base.

[Part M of Building Regulations](#) sets specific requirements which cover the majority of new dwelling houses built within the Cheltenham area and include guidance on:

- Approach to the dwelling/development
- External ramp and ambulant stepped approach
- Communal entrances, lifts and stairs
- Principal entrance doors and level thresholds
- Circulation areas – door and hall widths
- Sanitary facilities – WC facilities at ground floor level
- Services and controls – switch, socket and control height requirements.

The Council's Building Control team work closely with architects and developers, at both design and construction stages, to ensure all new dwelling applications submitted to the Local Authority, reasonably satisfy these access requirements.

The Building Control team also work closely with homeowners and housing associations when dwellings are being adapted for disabled access requirements and provide a fee exempt application and inspection service for this work.