

Council

27 February 2025

Public Questions (3 total)

1. Question from Trevor Witton-Bourke to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

Cheltenham Borough Council has confirmed that it has expressed an interest in participating in the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Pilots scheme. Under what governance route was this expression of interest authorised (for example Cabinet decision, individual Cabinet Member decision, or delegated officer authority), and were elected members formally informed prior to submission?

Member response

Thank you for your question.

The expression of interest in the Home Office pilot scheme was submitted by officers in line with the council's scheme of delegation. As Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, I am proud that Cheltenham is a Town of Sanctuary and that we continue to welcome refugees and migrants. I therefore fully support the decision taken by officers.

It is important to emphasise that submitting an expression of interest does not commit the council to participating in the scheme, even if Cheltenham were to be selected. Any decision to proceed would be subject to further consideration.

2. Question from Trevor Witton-Bourke to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas

If Cheltenham is accepted into the pilot, will participation be brought to Cabinet or Full Council for formal consideration before implementation, and what arrangements will be put in place to ensure transparency and public reporting as further information becomes available?

Member response

Thank you for your question.

If Cheltenham is invited to take part in the Home Office pilot, any decision to participate would be brought through the appropriate democratic route in line with

the council's constitution. At this stage, we do not have any detail of the pilot and therefore it is not possible to confirm what that route will be.

We are committed to ensuring openness and transparency throughout this process. Should the pilot progress, we will establish clear arrangements for sharing information with elected members and the public.

3. Question from Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The recent Audit report from Bishop Fleming raises many concerns including, but not limited to:

- Reference to disclaimed audit opinion by previous auditors over the 2022/23 statement of accounts
- Unable to complete work due to delay in finalising financial statements and quality of said statements
- Anticipate issuing disclaimed audit opinion due to lack of assurances over opening balances
- Unable to complete work on valuation of land and buildings (and Council dwellings), investment properties, and heritage assets

Given these concerns, particularly with regards to valuations of assets and of both opening and current balances, how confident is the council of the asset values in the 2026/2027 budget, and how much has been allowed within the budget should any re-statement of asset values or opening balances be required once the audit is completed? This is considered particularly key given the importance of secure financial status as we head into any unitary arrangements.

Member response

Thank you for your question.

It is widely recognised that the local government audit process has been under considerable pressure over the last few years which has resulted in a backlog of audits and seen the introduction of the statutory audit backstop date of the end of February. The position we find ourselves in is not ideal. Bishop Fleming have stated that they plan to build back assurance in 2025/26 by testing the 31 March 2026 year-end balance on all of the assets. We have now carried out the full revaluation of our assets and are expecting a markedly improved position for 2025/26 external audit.