

## FULL COUNCIL – 25 JANUARY 2010

No.	Question from/to	Question	Response
1	Councillor P. McLellan to Cabinet Member for Performances and Resources	“Can the Cabinet Member advise me of the basis for assuming increases in Crematorium income in the Administration draft budget for 2010/11 and 2011/12?”	“A review of the Cemetery and Crematorium service has recently taken place, with a report being considered by Cabinet on 13 January 2010. A business case has been developed as part of this work for various income generation activities at the Crematorium, including remembrance sales and tea room/wake facilities. This business case has been used to inform the financial strategy.”
2	Councillor P. McLellan to Cabinet Member for Performances and Resources	“Can the Cabinet Member advise me how she plans to allocate cuts to voluntary groups in the Administration draft budget over the three year period?”	“The three-year money plan includes indicative reductions to meet the funding shortfall in each of the next three years. The proposals are currently being considered as part of the formal consultation process. A helpful meeting with representatives from the voluntary sector has already taken place and we plan to adopt a strategic approach with a clear focus on outcomes and value for money, working together with the sector to deliver any savings included in the final budget proposals. To minimise impact on existing arrangements, in the first year, consideration will be given to reductions in non-committed grants, which cease at the end of 2009/10.”
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“Can the Cabinet Member confirm that the strategic approach identified involves a planned across the board 10% cut in all SLAs to the voluntary sector in 2010/11. Does she consider this method focuses on outcomes?”	“What I can say is that the Cabinet Member to my side, Councillor Williams, has been in negotiation with the voluntary sector, in fact she has had some recent meetings with that, and she can give you more detail on what has happened across the voluntary sector proposals.”

			<p><b>Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods</b></p> <p>“We had a further meeting with the voluntary sector last Thursday, the Leader and myself met with some representatives of the GAVCA group and we listened again to their concerns about some of the proposals and the percentages we were looking at on their budget cuts. Let us be fair, the voluntary sector know that they also have to look at how they provide their services and make cuts. They do understand the predicament that this Council is in. When you think that across the country where money is being squeezed everywhere, this Council historically has always been very good at giving lots of money to the voluntary sector. We have one of the highest grant awards every year in the country. We have listened and after that meeting, there was a debate and discussion with the finance manager and I was pleased to report to Council that we actually have re-looked at the grants and we are now proposing that in the first year, instead of the proposed 10% cut, we are now looking at 4.7%. The second year between 2011/12 we were looking at a 20% cut and now we are looking at 9.3% and in 2012/13 we were looking again at another 10% and we are pleased to report that 3.3% is what we can do and this will match Council’s overall additional savings targets. I have reported the news to Sally Pickering who is the main person at GAVCA in Gloucester and all I can say is that she was extremely pleased. She said to me today that she is glad that this Council and this administration has listened to the voluntary sector and their concerns and she thinks that those new percentages that we have given to them are very workable for them. I do not know if you would like any more information?”</p>
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3	Councillor P. McLellan to Cabinet Member for Performances and Resources	“Can the Cabinet Member advise of how she arrives at figures for System savings in the Administration draft budget over the three year period?”	“The Council has a very good track record of identifying and implementing cashable efficiency gains to date. As part of the Management development programme, all managers have been trained in systems thinking methodology to enable further reviews, service improvements and efficiencies across the council. The savings from system improvements will be from the continuation of process reviews that has been ongoing for the last 6 months. These have already indicated potential savings that allow confidence in the 3-year Money Plan targets.”
4	Councillor P. McLellan to Cabinet Member for Performances and Resources	“Can the Cabinet Member indicate to me the level of interest in sponsorship of assets to indicate additional income of £135k over the period of the Three Year Money Plan?”	“We are currently in the process of discussing the arrangements with external companies who specialise in delivering sponsorship advertising for assets, who have a proven track record with other councils. Indicative figures suggest that the target could be exceeded.”
5	Councillor P. McLellan to Cabinet Member for Performances and Resources	“In the past the Conservative administration has not been keen on borrowing for investing in the capital programme – how will she fund borrowing (excluding Housing) of c.£6.8m over the next three years?”	“Wherever possible capital receipts will be used to support and help deliver the capital programme. The three-year money plan approved last year introduced the need to consider borrowing to support the investment programme. All capital projects are assessed on an individual basis and require individual Business Cases. Each project requiring borrowing will have an anticipated payback period of between 3 and 10 years, depending on the nature of the project. The crematorium project is such an example.”
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“This is clearly a change of policy as the administration has been upfront in saying in the past that they would use capital receipts to pay for all capital projects. Does she agree this change of tack is an admission of failure?”	“Regarding this, this was not a change in policy, this was in fact introduced as part of our Three Year Money Plan last year and it is not a failure, it is proof of prudent budgeting processing and we want to make sure that we use all the methodologies available to us to make sure we have a robust budget to set us forward for the future.”

6	Councillor S. Field to Cabinet Member for Environment	<p>“How can residents get more involved in looking after their own street - clearing litter, cigarette ends etc, or snow and ice as necessary?”</p>	<p>“Our street cleaning teams work hard at keeping our City clean and tidy, and we continue to work to further improve the service. There is of course a finite resource that is deployed on street cleaning and the Council would welcome residents who want to assist in keeping their area clean and tidy. Residents picking up any windblown litter, cigarette ends or other such nuisance items and placing it in their wheeled refuse bin can help to maintain the quality of our neighbourhoods. Our new Neighbourhood Management team are available to work with residents on such matters and can be contacted on 396396 or at <a href="mailto:heretohelp@gloucester.gov.uk">heretohelp@gloucester.gov.uk</a>.</p> <p>Our street cleansing teams have also been assisting the County Council, who are responsible for maintaining the roads and footpaths, including dealing with snow and ice. The County Council issued the following as part of a press release on 12 January.</p> <p>People concerned about the legal implications of salting pavements themselves should not worry.</p> <p>The latest guidance from the Government's Cabinet Office says:</p> <p>"We would not expect courts to find individuals who clear pavements liable for injuries, provided this that is done in a reasonable manner."</p> <p>Cllr Stan Waddington, Cabinet Member for Environment, said: "We know one of the biggest concerns people have at the moment is slippery pavements and town centres.</p> <p>It is not physically possible for us to treat the county's 1,500 miles of pavement ourselves but we are significantly increasing the amount of salt available to the district and parish councils to treat on our behalf.</p> <p>Working together we can help support our local businesses by improving access to town centres and encouraging people to visit.</p> <p>I would also ask residents to do their bit – we are still filling grit bins so please use this in your neighbourhood." “</p>
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>

		<p>“Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer. He mentions the gritting of city streets and pavements during the recent bad weather and I was just wondering how this is related enough and why the city centre streets did not seem to be gritted when we had the recent snow?”</p>	<p>“I would not want to get into a specific argument with you, but the streets were gritted as and when grit was available and as and when people were available to do it. It is always that one might say should be gritted more and should be gritted wider, but in difficult circumstances I know the crews did their absolute best.”</p>
7	<p>Councillor S. Field to Cabinet Member for Environment</p>	<p>“Thank you for your help in getting the Worcester Street railway bridge 'pigeon-proofed'. Sadly, the pigeons are now perching atop the crossing button post, with the result that there is guano on the crossing button. Can this be pigeon-proofed as well please? I have reported this to the County Council but so far have not had a response.”</p>	<p>“The work to pigeon proof the Worcester Street Bridge has been successful and I am sure that all members would like to join me in thanking the officers who worked hard to secure the necessary agreements from Network Rail and commission the work.</p> <p>The crossing button post is equipment maintained by Gloucestershire Highways and officers are following up your request for this relatively minor additional work with their County colleagues.”</p>
8	<p>Councillor S. Field to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture</p>	<p>“Would it be possible to investigate turning the disused tannery/garage on the corner of Worcester Street/ Gouda Way into a community garden? It is an eyesore at the moment and could do with some benches and greenery.”</p>	<p>“This is an important and prominent site. The remains of Tanners Hall are a significant heritage site being a Scheduled Ancient Monument i.e. of national significance. The remains date back to the thirteenth century and are a rare survival of elements of a stone merchants house from this period.</p> <p>The condition of the monument has been the focus of concern for some years and the site is included on the as Category 1 (the most serious) on the Buildings at Risk (BAR) register. Although we have been very successful in reducing Gloucester’s BAR buildings over the years with successes such as 66 Westgate Street and Horton Road Hospital, the solution to Tanners Hall has proved elusive, as ownership has changed and it is a rather difficult site. Officers have been working very hard to engage with the latest owner and find a solution.</p> <p>There is some positive movement. Architects have been employed to work up a scheme and draft proposals have been seen by officers. There have also been discussions with English Heritage. Officers have been advised that the owner is keen to make progress.</p>

			<p>Councillor Field’s suggestion of a community garden is a nice idea but it would probably involve a compulsory purchase and, of course, the costs of creating and maintaining such a feature. I do not think that is a realistic proposition in the current climate particularly when the owner is actively exploring a solution. I will ask officers to continue their good work and to keep Councillor Field informed of progress on this difficult but important site.”</p>
9	<p>Councillor S. Field to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture</p>	<p>“What were the reasons behind the decision not to apply for European City of Culture status?”</p>	<p>“The feedback from the Government’s appointed consultants, Regeneris, was helpful and constructive. They considered the idea of Gloucester and Cheltenham submitting a joint entry was very exciting but that it was still relatively embryonic and needed more hard evidence of joint working if the bid was to be successful. The consultants made very clear, and recommended accordingly, that a 2017 bid was more appropriate and much more likely to succeed. They also gave some great feedback on how to move the proposal forward.</p> <p>Working together with Cheltenham has been a great learning experience and the plans included within the initial bid, for greater joint working, will be progressed and built on to provide the basis for a potentially very strong 2017 bid.”</p>
10	<p>Councillor S. Field to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture</p>	<p>“Was there any response from Marketing Gloucester to my request to have disused shop fronts repainted?”</p>	<p>“As Councillor Field will be aware Marketing Gloucester has had some significant success with its campaign to dress empty units with pictorial hoardings. There is also a facelift scheme that I have implemented in Eastgate Street, which makes grants available for property improvements, including shopfronts. We will continue to press private owners and agents to smarten up their premises by all practical means available to us.</p> <p>Marketing Gloucester did discuss with some potential volunteers whether they wished to undertake a clean-up of empty shop premises, but they preferred to use their efforts in other ways. The Council has recently been awarded £50,000 from the Government to deal with empty shops and this is one way in which part of the funding could be used. The City Centre Stakeholder Group will consider this matter at its next meeting on 28 January.</p>

			<p>On 13 January 2010 Cabinet approved and launched a brand new City Centre Action Plan, which I led the production of through the City Centre Stakeholder Group. That plan includes positively managing the city centre environment as a top priority.</p> <p>If there are any specific vacant properties that Councillor Field considers requires particular attention I would be pleased to take these up with the relevant officers and Marketing Gloucester.”</p>
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		<p>“Thank you to the Leader for his answer. I am getting a bit of déjà vu because I did think at the September Council when he asked for specific properties and shops I did give him a list. I think the main one, the worst one, is the YMCA shop on Westgate Street which is a terrible colour anyway and when the paint is flaking off it, it really does look bad.”</p>	<p>“I do apologise to Councillor Field, I do recall him mentioning that one specific example and I will give an answer very similar to the one I would have given last time. There will of course be a line we must draw as to where the assistance we can give will have to stop. I am certainly not opposed to us giving some fairly basic assistance to owners of properties to clean them up when that helps to improve the street scene, but the idea that somehow this authority, in the very strict financial circumstances in which it finds itself, can go around painting shop fronts that belong to lots of private owners is not really something that we can consider. As I referred to in my answer, we do have a sum of money available from the government to deal with empty shops and a report is going to the City Centre Stakeholder Group later on this week. We will be looking at a very wide range of approaches on how to deal with this issue.”</p>

11	Councillor S. Field to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources	“How much did the Christmas events in this city cost?”	<p>“These events are important in putting Gloucester on the map and helping the local economy. The Council’s contribution to the Christmas activities delivered by Marketing Gloucester was agreed at last year’s budget meeting at £125k, with an additional 15K to extend the Christmas lights in lower Eastgate Street which has proved very popular.</p> <p>Marketing Gloucester brought in additional income from various sponsors such as, The Mall, Kings Walk and the Regional Development Agency, with contributions in kind from a number of other partners.</p> <p>Historically the Christmas events been funded out of LABGI grants but as part of our Three Year Money Plan we have now established an ongoing provision in our base budget.</p> <p>The Council also ran a number of Christmas-related events at the Guildhall and Folk Museum which were contained within existing budgets.”</p>
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her answer. My question is very simple. Does she think it is worth it?”	“Thank you for the question. Of course I think it is worth it. I think it is important that we support our local economy and part of that is getting the footfall into Gloucester and getting the people to support our city and make sure that we are a city to be proud of, not a city that is neglected. So in answer to your question, I do wholeheartedly support it.”
12	Councillor S. Field to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources	“How much was spent by this Council on fireworks in 2009?”	<p>“The Council did not directly spend any money on fireworks during the year, as events are now provided by Marketing Gloucester.</p> <p>They estimate that they have spent £10k on fireworks. The only event at which fireworks were used was the summer festival finale, which was very popular with the public and the high standard of previous years’ events was maintained.”</p>

13	Councillor P. McLellan to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health.	“Following the introduction of Choice Based Lettings can the Cabinet Member advise me if the period of time whilst GCH properties are empty has changed?”	<p>“Gloucester City Homes have made significant improvements in reducing the average time taken to re let void properties since the organisation began managing the Council’s housing stock in 2005. Performance has been consistently well into the top quartile.</p> <p>Whilst the relevant quarterly report is currently being finalised, I can report that there was a temporary increase in void times for a six week period following the start of the system. However, since that period void times have returned to exceed target, and at no time did performance drop outside top quartile.</p> <p>The introduction of Choice Based lettings has also resulted in increased interest in several properties where there has traditionally been low demand.”</p>
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“Can I thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. Some vulnerable people to whom I have spoken recently in Coney Hill are still unaware that they have to regularly check for Choice Based Lettings, in other words, it is not a one-off situation and before he asks, I have sent them in the right direction and sent them off to the local childrens’ centre or the Coney Hill Neighbourhood Project to look at this. However, clearly there have been significant numbers of people in the same position across the city. Will he do all he can to ask officers to be proactive in regularly contacting vulnerable people. It seems it is a very reactive approach he is adopting at the moment, could he be more proactive please?”	<p>“I am grateful for the supplementary. That is an area of work which has concerned me and many Members since we began to look at the introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL). I often used to give the example of the men and women who live at the night shelter. I think it is very important indeed that everybody who needs to register for CBL is aware of the scheme and is aware of how the scheme operates. I am assured by officers that every opportunity is taken to ensure that everybody here is eligible and who needs to register registers and I also am told that we highlight to people who do register and who perhaps have difficulties in accessing IT on a regular basis that they are able to register a standing request for individual properties or individual types of property.</p> <p>I will ensure that officers make sure that that message goes out yet again. I am fairly sure that it is being robustly taken to every corner of the city, but I am grateful to Councillor McLellan because it is very important that everybody who needs housing in Gloucester is aware of how CBL works and it is important that they are told of all their rights and opportunities to register for CBL. The actual answer is yes, I will do that. Thank you for raising it, it is a very important issue.”</p>

14	Councillor P. McLellan to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health	“Following the introduction of choice based lettings can the Cabinet Member advise me if he feels that vulnerable people are being adequately helped to enable them to operate on a level playing field?”	<p>“I am confident that appropriate assistance is available to any vulnerable persons who need assistance with the Choice based lettings system.</p> <p>As of 13 January the register is showing 3225 applications with 214 applications received for December. Over 700 customers have received assistance from officers either over the phone or in person. The three public access PCs provided in Herbert Warehouse reception have also been well used.</p> <p>Officers are available to make home visits where required. Applicants can be assisted to make use of the automatic bidding facility, and officers also match customers with complex needs to specific properties.</p> <p>I urge all Members to encourage residents with concerns to contact the dedicated team through the contact centre on 396396.”</p>
15	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Environment	“With ‘green’ burials becoming more popular, does the Council have any provision to accommodate these? Has the Council looked into the possibilities for income and the enhancement of the appearance of certain city sites by them becoming memorial woodland?”	<p>“The Council has provision at Coney Hill Cemeteries and Crematorium for 'green' burials. The present area will accommodate 'green' burials at the current rate of uptake for the next twenty years, with the provision to extend in the future should demand increase.</p> <p>The Council are always looking for ways to increase income, however the usage for 'green' burials and other memorial woodland is sufficiently provided for within the existing Cemeteries and Crematorium site, therefore it has not been necessary to look elsewhere within the City.</p> <p>Hope this provides you with the information necessary.”</p>
16	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Heritage and Leisure	“The ditching to the side of Abbeymead Playing Fields off Lobley Drive has been cleared to the edge of the fields, but the ditching continues along the side of the cycle track towards the balancing pond and is full of debris and tangled undergrowth. Can we complete the project please to ensure that this drainage ditch works!?”	“Whilst there is no evidence of a flooding risk to properties, Officers already have plans for further works to ensure that this drainage ditch conveys surface water run off from the playing fields.”

		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“For the Abbeymead playing fields, the reason for having the ditches cleared was to help the adoption of this land so we could get ahead with the Abbeymead play area. Can the Cabinet Member tell us whether, because we now have the ditches done, we have now cleared the way so the adoption can take place because we have been waiting for about a year and a half now?”	“My understanding is that there are still some legal issues in connection with the adoption of the land that is still being cleared through the County Council, so it is not a question of drainage or ditching or anything else, it is actually a legal issue that is being investigated by officers. In terms of the ditching, we are working with the Probation Service to help expedite that process of getting it all cleared.”
17	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Heritage and Leisure	“The wheeled sports facility in Abbeymead has been popular but the main half-pipe retains water in the centre. Can we come up with a means to allow it to drain since when wet only the most skilled can use it? Can it be tilted very slightly (or will that make it even more difficult for the bikers and skaters)? Can it have small drainage holes drilled in it that will not fill up or alter the run? The middle triangular jump in the other run has not got friction grip paint on it, so can we address that please?”	“I would like to join Councillor Whittaker in recognising the popularity of this excellent new facility. Officers will be in contact with the users of the facility and the manufacturers to investigate the issues that he has raised, and will keep him informed of any remedial works.”
18	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods	“It is now 30 months since the flash floods occurred. Do we have data that indicates the maximum flow through each bridge and have they been sequentially set up so that as volume increases nearer the outflow into the Severn that the structures do not cause the problems we had before?”	<p>“Members will be aware of the extensive amount of flood resilience work that has been undertaken in the City since 2007 working with our partners at the County Council, and Environment Agency in particular. Our combined budgets have seen well over £1.5m spent on protecting City residents from flooding.</p> <p>The Environment Agency have carried out complex modelling exercises on the City’s watercourses, which will include data on the capacity of bridges and culverts, the majority of which are Highway culverts.</p> <p>In 2007 the volume and intensity of rainfall meant that culverts of all sizes were overwhelmed. Whilst I can see the reasoning behind Councillor Whittaker’s proposal, it would not be financially or logistically feasible to increase the capacity of all of the City’s culverts in the manner he suggests.</p> <p>If any Members would like to discuss these issues in more detail then they can contact the Council’s Flood Resilience and Land Drainage Officer, Wayne Best.”</p>

19	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Environment	“At Abbeymead Playing Field the cycle track bollards have been avoided by Enterprise vehicles presumably to empty the dog bins. This has caused huge messy, muddy, unsightly ruts to the side of the path. Has this happened in other park areas in the city? Do we try and stop Enterprise doing this or should we accommodate them by replacing the bollards with lockable ones that they can raise and lower when they need access?”	<p>“Where possible, and without causing excessive damage, it is usual practice for vehicles to drive slowly around the edges of grassed areas whilst carrying out routine work.</p> <p>This particular issue has been raised with Enterprise and the operative has been reminded of the need to avoid damage. There are many areas where vehicle access is controlled by lockable gates or bollards. Officers will investigate whether a removable bollard would be beneficial at this location, and also whether remedial works are appropriate.”</p>
		<b>Supplementary Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
		“Just to ask the Cabinet Member, should Enterprise be sorting out the pond in Abbeymead playing fields, because that is just full of everything. I think the only thing missing is a supermarket trolley!”	“I think the best thing I can suggest is, as I am sure Councillor Whittaker has raised this with Enterprise through the normal channels, and if he has not, then that is probably the best way to do it please.”
20	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources	“Following the decision by Iceland’s President Olafur Grimsson, his decision is indeed grim for this Council. With the now increasing likelihood that we will get little back from Iceland, has the Cabinet Member taken this loss fully into account in projections for the next 3 years?”	<p>“There is no direct impact on this Council from the decision by Iceland’s President, as our deposit was lodged with the Heritable Bank, which is a UK bank, subject to UK law, with UK administrators.</p> <p>There is no change to the anticipated recovery of this deposit and, indeed, we have recently received the second stage payment, in line with expectations.”</p>
21	Councillor Whittaker to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources	“In light of the knowledge that public finances are under strain and that we as a Council can expect reducing help from Central Government over the coming years, has a Task and Finish Group been set up to look at all possible ways that expertise within this Council’s jurisdiction can be utilised for income.... and if not, why not?”	<p>“You are right to highlight the pressures that we are currently facing, and will continue to face with the public finances and, indeed, we are constantly looking at ways to generate additional income streams within the Council.</p> <p>As part of the current Budget Consultation we have a number of such proposals, such as increased income from facilities in our Crematorium and sponsorship of our assets. However, as always, I welcome any suggestions from Members on how we can increase our income. The creation of Task and Finish Groups is a matter for Scrutiny Committee to determine.”</p>