

CLERKS REPORT – DECEMBER 2023

DEFIBRILLATOR TRAINING – South West Ambulance Foundation Trust is offering a free training session. I have requested to schedule this for some time in the Spring.



Firstly, thank you to those of you who attended one of the Parish Forums earlier in the year where we discussed planning across the district. It was fantastic to see so many of you there and I hope that it was an informative session for you.

A message that came loud and clear from those meetings was the need to us to work closer together as the district and parish councils on planning. As a way to make this happen we would like to float the idea of a planning “roadshow” where we come to different areas of the district to work with parish councils on different elements of the planning system.

At each session we would focus on a different planning related topic with our officers giving an informative (and hopefully interesting) presentation before opening up to questions and discussion. The aim of these sessions would be to help you understand more about specific areas of the planning system and then for us to discuss how we can work together around it.

We currently have the following topics (in no particular order) which we feel would be of interest to you but please feel free to make your own suggestions. Each session would be hosted by the specialist officer in the planning team relevant to the topic of that day. This will also help you get to know the team better.

- Biodiversity Net Gain (how we protect and encourage growth of our wildlife)
- Planning Enforcement (how we take action against those who don't follow

- planning laws and policies)
- Local Plan Update (how we plan for the future of the district including Housing & Land Supply)
 - Cotswold Design Guide (how we set expectations around what new buildings should look like and operate)
 - Neighbourhood Planning (how so set local plans for the growth of your area)
 - Material Considerations (what councils consider when they are deciding on a planning application)
 - Improvements to the planning service (how we are looking to improve what we do - providing a better service to residents)

The intention (should there be sufficient interest) is to start these events early next year with the venues to be confirmed. We would like to move the meetings around the district and any support in hosting them would be appreciated.

The next consideration will be the timings of the meetings. It is currently proposed that we hold them in the early afternoon which allows for travel in the light in the winter months and reduces the costs of the meeting to the Council as it is during the working day. However, we appreciate that timing may not work as well for you so your thoughts would be helpful.

Robert Weaver
Chief Executive of Cotswold DC



The county council has released details of its ambitious budget for 2024/25. In the current proposals, spending for 2024/25 will reach £609 million, an increase of more than £42 million on 2023/24 levels.

In addition to stopping Gloucestershire's rubbish going to landfill by turning into green energy, the Energy from Waste plant will generate a £15 million boost to next year's budget.

As part of our £100 million investment, the council proposes to continue its investment into highways transformation work. This has already seen 212 roads resurfaced and 50,000 potholes filled this year – making a real difference for all who use Gloucestershire roads.

Some £37.4 million has been ear-marked in 2024/25, as part of a £171 million scheme, to make significant improvements at M5 Junction 10 and completion of the Arle Court Transport Hub

It has been proposed to allocate £19.8 million to school improvements, including a new special school in Gloucester and a new primary school at Bishops Cleeve.

As well as this, the budget includes a £8.3 million Disabled Facilities Grant to support people with a disability to make adaptations to their homes.

Plans would see £1.3 million invested into increasing the frequency and operating hours of 21 of the county's popular timetabled bus routes, with the bookable bus service, The Robin, also due to be extended from May.

A total of £1.9 million is proposed to be invested into tackling key road safety hotspots and providing specialist training to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

The council also plans to continue the financial support for residents who have welcomed Ukrainian guests into their homes.

The budget proposes raising £14.2 million to help fund services through a council tax increase of 2.99%. The proposals would also see £7.8 million raised specifically to support work with the most vulnerable adults in the county through a further 2% increase in the adult social care precept.

Despite this increase the council still expects to have one of the lowest council tax levels of any county council. Based on a band D property, residents would pay an additional £6.34 each month.

The council continues to challenge itself to work more effectively and as a result has identified £23 million in savings, additional income and efficiencies for next year.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Leader of Gloucestershire County Council, said: "This is a budget that will mean 2024 is yet another year where we will deliver for communities, for businesses and for the future of this great county.

"Unlike many other councils who are struggling to balance the books, we haven't had to make dramatic cuts to the services you rely on each day – in fact, we've increased our investment in them by £42 million.

"We want to know what you think about these plans. Please take a few minutes to complete our short survey so that we can listen to your thoughts before finalising the budget."

For more information on the budget and details on how to have your say, visit www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/budget2024-25.

Public consultation runs from 7 December 2023 until 5pm on 11 January 2024.



Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswolds shares tips for how to save money on your energy bills

As people across Stroud and Cotswolds Districts face another winter of high energy bills, Citizens Advice shares how small changes can make a big difference when it comes to saving energy and lowering costs.

The charity has teamed up with the Energy Saving Trust to share advice on getting help if you are struggling with energy bills and tips on how to cut energy costs around the home.

People can make simple changes to save money on their energy bills and don't need to wait until the colder months to do so. These include:

- Washing clothes at 30°C could save around £15 per year - and reducing the number of wash cycles by one per week could save a further £15.
- Reducing shower time to four minutes could save a typical household as much as £75 a year.
- Swapping one bath a week for a four-minute shower could save an average of £17 a year.
- Avoiding overfilling the kettle could save around £12 a year on electricity.
- Draught-proofing windows and doors will help your home feel warmer and could save around £50 a year on bills.
- Turning appliances off at the wall/plug when you're not using them could save an average of £60 a year.
- Turning the thermostat down by 1°C could save around £115 a year.

Installing a Smart Meter can help people get better control of their energy use and budgets. Smart meters come with an In-home Display Unit (IHD) that shows how much you're using and its cost, almost as you use it – in real time. The government has instructed all energy suppliers to offer households a smart meter by 2025. You don't have to have one but may benefit from reduced tariffs with some suppliers. The government estimates that customers with smart meters save an average of £50 a year.

Check you're getting all the support you're entitled to...

Lifestyle changes won't be possible for everyone and may not be enough to cover the hole in household budgets caused by higher prices, so Citizens Advice is also urging people to check they're getting all the support they're entitled to. This could include:

- Checking what benefits you're entitled to by using a benefits calculator
- Warm Home Discount — a £150 annual discount if you get certain benefits
- Cold weather payments — payments if you get certain benefits and the weather is extremely cold
- Grants from your energy supplier — to help you pay off debts you may owe

For more information, visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk

If you owe money to your energy supplier, you should speak to them as soon as possible. They're responsible for helping you find a way to pay your bills.

Elizabeth Hall, Chief Officer of Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswold Districts said:

"We know lots of people are worried about how they'll cover their energy bills this winter. So it's important people know what support they're entitled to and how to cut back on energy costs where they can. Every day we hear from people who are already doing everything they can, but sky-high costs mean it's simply not enough. We want to remind anyone struggling they're not alone, if you need support managing your bills, please contact us."

If you cannot access the website or need further help you can contact Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswold Districts on 0808 800 0510 or 0808 800 0511 Monday to Thursday, or Email us using the form on our website (www.citizensadvice-stroudandcotswold.org.uk).

**Could your
Winter Fuel
Payment
help people
in need?**



Donate to Pay Warmth Forward

If you feel you don't need your Winter Fuel Payment, donate it to the Severn Wye Pay Warmth Forward scheme.

We'll use it to get radiators and electric blankets to vulnerable people in your area with no heat this winter.

Find out more and donate
severnwye.org.uk/donate



Energy, sustainability and wellbeing now, and for the future.



Dear Councils and Councillors

I'm Simon Sansome founder of Snowball Community, (known as Snowball). You may be aware of us as we are the biggest disability app in the world, but I need your help.

We (Snowball) have been active on Apple and Android for about 14 months and we have had almost 40,000 reviews from people all over the UK and if you look on the app there will most likely be places from your areas already on the app.

Last week we won the Santander national award, last month won the Digital Tech award at the Disability Power 100 and I was named in the top ten as one of the most influential people in the UK.

I will explain Snowballs main feature and then how we can help one another. Snowball is a free review platform, think TripAdvisor for the disabled community, you can add places, leave reviews and say if you will go back. It is there to help people like myself with a disability to access my local community but also things like, days out, holidays, staycations, pubs, restaurants, town halls, blue badge car parking bays, accessible toilets, churches and more.

Snowball had an excellent response from the Church of England when I appeared on BBC Radio 4 Yours and Yours a few months back with hundreds of churches being reviewed. We also featured on Steph's Packed Lunch a few weeks ago.

What we are also doing is collecting massive amounts of data so that we can advise councils where access can be improved in their community. Here is one example. A number of volunteers spent a few hours leaving Snowball reviews of their towns, in this case Loughborough and Syston in Leicestershire. With the data collected we can advise Leicestershire County Council, Charnwood Borough Council and Syston Town Council on issues in the area regarding access, how to help business and things like housing, planning and other council services.

What they did is they visited business in their towns took a picture on their phone, added a place using the app and then left a review on the Snowball app. The review does not need a lot of detail, it could just be a few sentences, things like is their automatic door, a disabled accessible toilet, ramp access, it is the person own options on access.

What this did was produce data on where is accessible in the towns and where's not. The data said that 48% of business in Loughborough compared to 25% of accessible business on Syston. Data like this could also assist with investment in the area.

So, what I would like if this is possible for your council to discuss Snowball at your next council meeting, promote Snowball in your area and get the community involved, including local businesses but also, if possible, review your area so that we can help one another create an equal and inclusive community.

Thank you for your time.

Simon Sansome
Founder of Snowball Community.

If you have any questions, please contact our wonderful Snowball Support Team at support@snowball.community.

Links to app

Apple

<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/snowball-community/id1624679548>

Android <https://play.google.com/store/search?q=snowball+community&c=apps&hl=en&gl=US>

We have over 100,000 followers on social media, here is the link to our Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/FreezeSnowball>