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**STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Council – 21 October 2021

We can now enclose the questions and answers submitted under Agenda Item 13.

13. **MEMBER QUESTIONS**

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**Members Questions to Full Council.**

**Question from Councillor Mark Ryder**

**Question 1**

The “Strategy for Leisure and Wellbeing in Stroud District 2021-2040 Final Draft” identifies an opportunity for increasing the footprint of council leisure facilities to under-served parts of the district with a “leisure local” option including a small additional site. Further, the report identifies “in the Sharpness area”, in 4.5.6.

I recognise that Sharpness is a future residential growth point identified in the draft local plan. However, I would draw council attention to the existing growth points in and around Hardwicke Ward that have already received thousands of new residents over the past ten years and thousands more to come based on proposed allocations/developments.

As an under-served area of the district for leisure services right now, would council confirm that Hardwicke Ward, Hunts Grove and Great Oldbury deserve priority for the “leisure local” centre based on existing need as opposed to the future needs of the potential Sharpness growth?

**Reply**

The Leisure and Wellbeing Strategy is a vital and exciting statement of the Council’s commitment to ensure high quality leisure, wellbeing and sports opportunities across the whole of the district for the next 20 years. It includes planning for investment in new and improved facilities in which we can all be proud and which reflect our changing and growing communities.

The section of the Strategy you refer to has a misprint and should read A38/M5 corridor as we acknowledged a number of new dwellings along this stretch from Hunts Grove through to Sharpness. We noted the misprint once it was published and arranged for the consultants to update it to reflect the stretch of area under consideration.

The strategy provides a framework for the council to explore the potential of increasing its leisure portfolio along with other community and service interventions. Before any commitment is made we would need to conduct a number of feasibility studies, locate potential sites, source funding and carry out extensive public consultation.

I hope this assures you that no specific decisions have been made and that everything is still open in terms of potential within the strategy at this stage.



**Questions from Councillor Stephen Davies**

**Question 1**

Will Housing Committee see and debate the full report from Internal Audit on the Out of Hours Service?

**Reply**

The full Internal Audit Report into the Council's Out of Hours service is a confidential document. It was considered and debated at Audit and Standards Committee on 28 September. This report is available to all members to review and consider as it is included in the Audit Report pack for that meeting.

A report by the Head of Contact Services referencing the findings in the Internal Audit report will be brought to the next Housing Committee. It will specifically and clearly address all the Audit Report's recommendations through a detailed Action Plan. While being mindful of confidentiality issues, this will be a public report and as such I am pleased to confirm it will be available for debate at Committee on 2 November.

**Question 2**

When will the Council be seen to return to providing a full service to residents and their elected representatives, Councillors?

**Reply**

I'm sure everyone would like to join me in thanking officers who have worked so hard in continuing to provide services throughout the pandemic. Even in the height of restrictions we have been able to provide a majority of our services, even if they have been provided in different ways. Officers have also had a huge amount of additional work during the pandemic, including distributing business grants, stepping up efforts to get homeless people into accommodation, supporting our community groups in their response, helping our businesses and communities recover in a Covid-safe way and supporting the most vulnerable people in our district.

It is important to say that at this point in time all Council services are up and running. Officers may be working in different ways and different places but no services are suspended as a result of the pandemic.

For example, we handled 60,301 calls from our residents via our main council phone menu during the period April to September 2021 in comparison to 47,674 in the same period in 2020. In Q1 and Q2 2020 we determined 962 planning applications and in the same period this year we have determined 1302 with the percentage determined in agreed timescales increasing from 87% to 91%. Our licensing team between September 2019 and September 2020 dealt with 5 licensing hearings and this year so far we have dealt with 4. In addition, between January and September 2020 we issued 122 temporary event notices and in the same period for this year we have issued 209.



We have heard our community say that communication with the Council is something that they value. Our fit for the future modernisation programme is considering how our communities access our services in future but even in the short term there are a variety of practical measures we have put in place to improve that interaction.

Reception is open at Ebley Mill for those who have made appointments. The appointments process not only helps keep our staff and visitors safe, but also means that we can provide an efficient and targeted service to those that need it most. We are moving towards a fully open reception but this will always be mindful of latest government safety guidance including any measures introduced through the Winter Plan B.

The “soft phone” system we have introduced means that staff phone numbers are now working as they were before the pandemic. We are looking to further improve this system to put numbers into groups to allow officers to answer their colleagues’ phones when they are not available. The softphones mean that our staff can use their phone lines wherever they are working, as they are linked through laptops.

For members we have introduced a dedicated directory so that members can see the contact details of all officers, including phone numbers. You can even sort by team so you can see who works in each service area of the Council. This is available on the member hub and democratic services have publicised this through the weekly member e-mails. We are also developing a detailed organigram of the council which outlines each service’s area of responsibility and gives a visual representation of where officers sit within a team. The specific contact details are provided to allow members to contact the appropriate team or officer directly and therefore receive an informed and speedy response. Members can also continue to use Microsoft Teams to contact officers through both instant messaging and video or phone calls.

Finally, our new Community Access Manager is working with Officers and Members to produce a corporate customer service standard. This will set out, in easy to understand form, our commitment to our community and define what they should expect from us when accessing our services.

The pandemic has shown us that even though all services are running there is always a need to do more, and this package of measures is designed to make it even easier to keep lines of communication open.

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