



Members of the Public's Questions to Council.

Questions from Jayne Bailey

Council Officers have decided that Wild Hogs Hedgehog Rescue based in Frampton does not provide a direct benefit to Council taxpayers and must therefore pay £800 per year in rates.

Can the Chair confirm whether it is their view that biodiversity and wildlife provide no benefit to residents in Stroud District, or should the decision be reversed?

Reply

The environment and climate change is one of our three key Strategic Priorities as set out in our Council Plan 2021-2026.

Within that overarching key strategic priority, "Biodiversity" is one of our stated objectives and within that we have committed to "Work with local communities and partners to protect and enhance the district's green infrastructure and biodiversity providing accessible environments that people can enjoy and which positively contribute to their good health".

As part of this process, we are working with partners to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, in line with our 2030 Strategy and our role within in the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership, which will seek opportunities to boost biodiversity. A recruitment process has also recently been completed for a new post of Strategic Lead for Biodiversity and Nature Recovery to lead the work in this area, and the successful candidate will take up the role in early 2023

Stroud District Council also believes in supporting the work of the voluntary and community sector. The Council has a budget for grants to voluntary organisations of £330k and there are currently no plans to change that for the 2023/24 year. This is a significant sum for a Council of our size, representing approximately 2% of our net revenue budget.

The Council has also launched the "Lucky Severn" lottery to help good causes within the District. To date this has raised nearly £70k for those good causes and we are grateful to Wild Hogs for having signed up to the lottery and congratulate them on their current ticket sales which are currently raising £676 a year for their cause. The Council is able to provide further free of charge publicity to support them in raising funds through that route.

We recognise that the legislation around business rates creates a challenge for charities, with only 80% relief being mandated by legislation. Any discretionary discount of the remaining 20% over and above that must be met in full from local budgets, a significant pressure when central government funding has been reduced in recent years.

In addition to the £330k of community grants, Stroud District Council currently awards discretionary relief of 20% to 164 non-profit organisations within the District. representing over £125k of support. To give this 20% to all of the remaining charities would be a loss of £897k of business rates income which would not be sustainable, unfortunately necessitating difficult decisions for officers of the Council.

With the obvious impact of only receiving 80% discount on our local charities this will now be an issue that we commit to pick up in our discussions with local MPs to raise the profile of this discussion with national government.

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