



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

30 September 2021

7.00 - 9.07 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Doina Cornell (Chair)

Councillor Chris Brine
Councillor Gordon Craig
Councillor Stephen Davies
Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Martin Percy
Councillor Nick Hurst*

*= Absent

Councillor Catherine Braun (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Keith Pearson
Councillor Steve Robinson
Councillor Mattie Ross
Councillor Ken Tucker
Councillor Chloe Turner

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Resources
Interim Monitoring Officer
Senior Democratic Services & Elections
Officer

Chief Executive
Corporate Policy and Governance
Manager

SRC.024 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hurst.

SRC.025 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

SRC.026 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meetings held on 22 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

SRC.027 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

SRC.028 **Draft Council Plan**

The Chair, Councillor Cornell, presented the report and advised that the Plan had already been considered by Housing, Environment and Community Services & Licensing Committee. The Chair drew the Committees attention to the 3 themes included in the Council Plan:

- Environment & Climate Change
- Community Resilience & Wellbeing
- Economy, Recovery & Regeneration.

The chair advised that the Council Plan was a mix of continuing with significant ongoing projects such as the Canal and new projects, some of which had arisen from the last 18 months of the pandemic.

Councillor Davies advised that the Conservative group hadn't supported the plan at previous committees, not because they disagreed with it, but because they wanted to take some time to consider it. He put forward two key suggestions:

1. That the plan should include annotation or colour coding to show which of the items Stroud District Council would be leading on and which were projects that the Council would be working in partnership with others but would not be leading.
2. That measures and smart objectives should be added to the key objectives to ensure that they have metrics by which they can use over the coming years to check if the Council had achieved it's aims.

The Chair thanked Councillor Davies for his constructive comments and advised the Committee to look at the performance management section of the report which advised that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be developed with Officers and Members. It was also confirmed that the Council Plan quarterly updates had been added to the Strategy and Resources Committee Work Programme.

Councillor Davies asked for confirmation that Committee Chairs would consider adding an item to their Work Programme to write or review the KPIs to help ensure that the work would be completed. The Chair advised that the service Committee Chairs were present and they would consider the request, it was also advised that the KPIs would be picked up in performance management which was on the Committees Work Programmes.

Councillor Brine agreed that the Council would need to be able to measure progress and that Performance Management needed to change so that Councillors were ensuring that they were looking at what the Council Plan says should be achieved and holding the administration to account. Councillor Braun stated that it would be really good for all Committee Members to work collaboratively to deliver on the Council Plan and that many of the projects would involve partnership work and that in the detailed KPIs further information could be provided on this.

Councillor Davies asked again whether the Council Plan could be annotated to show when Stroud District Council would be taking a lead and asked for a commitment that the KPIs would be brought back to Committee. The Chair advised that they would need to

consider Councillor Davies request to see whether that information would be better placed in the KPIs or in the Council Plan.

In response to a question from Councillor Turner it was confirmed that the Youth Council had been consulted on the Council Plan.

Councillor Craig asked whether the wording on Page 28 Section ER5.1 of the Council Plan could be changed to allow for amendments to the Local Plan. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Local Plan had to go through a statutory process and that this would involve recommendations from the inspector which the Environment Committee would then be able to consider prior to recommending to Council. Councillor Craig confirmed that he was satisfied with the assurance provided that the statutory process would be followed.

Councillor Pearson advised that Members of the Public may question how the Council was going to carry out the actions within the Council Plan as that detail had not been provided and he stated that it may not be achievable in the timescale. The Chair advised that some of the objectives in the plan had been started already and were longstanding projects.

Proposed by Councillor Ross and Seconded by Councillor Brine.

Councillor Ross thanked the Corporate Policy and Governance Manager for their work in helping to formulate the plan and advised that it was very different and much more complex than previous Council Plans.

Councillor Davies stated that there were two areas which he felt the plan was light on, young people and skills development. He stated that when it came down to Committee level he would like to make sure that there was a focus on those areas.

Councillor Braun commended the plan and drew Members attention to new projects including the work on retrofit and the retrofit centre for excellence. She stated that Housing Committees decision regarding the Council Owned properties would be a large piece of work over the next 30 years and that she hoped that this would also expand into the private sector.

Councillor Turner acknowledged that the KPIs were fundamental to the Council Plan and that in order to make the metrics meaningful more time was needed and consultation with the Committees before they could be included.

Councillor Percy expressed his enthusiasm for the plan which was well thought out, clear and comprehensive. He also stated that the objective regarding partnerships with the Parish and Town Councils would be a great step forward.

Councillor Pearson asked for confirmation that performance monitoring would be reviewed. The Chair confirmed that a report would be coming back to Committee in November and the Chief Executive advised that they were currently looking at new systems to replace the current system Excelsis.

Councillor Housden advised that he was disappointed that youth services weren't covered more in the plan but stated that there were many other good projects in there.

Councillor Brine in summing up stated that the Council Plan was full of good things for their Communities and that they would only be able to deliver it if everyone worked together and they were challenged if any projects started to go off track.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL **That the draft Council Plan 2021 – 2026 is adopted.**

SRC.029 **Budget Monitoring Report Q1 - 2020/21**

The Accountancy Manager presented the report and drew Members attention to the following key points:

- Section 3, Page 30 showed the general fund position with an expected overspend of £587k.
- Appendix D highlighted the Covid Pressures.
- Supported housing – the cost of the placement is higher than can be claimed from the Government.
- ICT – continued pressure– software costs are higher than our budget allocation.
- Additional income from garden waste and for the sale of recyclates.
- Summary of HRA in Section 5, Page 34 showed an expected overspend position of £352k largely due to the backlog of void properties.
- Capital Programme on Page 36 highlighted slippage for the Canal and Cycling and Walking plan.

Councillor Davies asked questions and received answers on the following topics:

- The Covid grants that had been received this year had been included in the table in Appendix D.
- As the landlord for vacant Council owned properties we pay council tax liability to ourselves however much of this was passed to the County Council and Police Authority.
- An additional resource for IT would be considered in budget setting and the Director of Change and Transformation would be involved to ensure that they had an understanding of the resources needed. The Chair advised that an update would be added to the work programme so that this could be looked at in more detail.

Councillor Robinson asked whether the electric charging points identified in paragraph 7.3 would be rolled out to market towns. Councillor Turner advised that she had requested a briefing from the Commissioner at the County Council for Councillors in the Stroud District on progress being made with electric charging points.

Councillor Pearson asked for clarification on the table on Page 45 as he did not think that the totals had been calculated correctly. The Accountancy Manager advised that the total variance was correct however she would look at the other figures in the table to check for errors.

Proposed by Councillor Turner and Seconded by Councillor Braun.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED**
- a) **To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund Revenue budget.**
 - b) **To note the outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account**
 - c) **To note the outturn forecast for the Capital Programme.**

SRC.030 **Budget Strategy**

The Strategic Director of Resources introduced the Budget Strategy and highlighted the following sections:

- Local Government funding – they were currently waiting for the Government spending review results.
- New Homes Bonus – the grant had declined for many years and was expected to decrease further to £218k in 2022/23.
- Business Rates – the planned ‘reset’ would have a big impact on the Stroud District.
- Business rates collected by renewable energy facilities had been separated out in Appendix A,
- Council Tax – A slight reduction in the numbers of people claiming Council Tax Support over the last few months. The final budget proposals to Council will include a recommendation to increase Council Tax by the referendum limit which is expected to be £5
- A number of cost pressures around inflation, pressures on contracts including the utilities contract which expires next year.
- Longer term budget adjustments in Paragraph 3.2
- Financial resilience
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Councillor Turner asked whether there were any other income sources the Council could look at in terms of the HRA aside from rent and service charges. The Accountancy Manager advised that options were limited as it had to directly relate to being a landlord.

Councillor Davies asked whether there was anything they could do to maximise the rates from renewable energy facilities. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that he had separated it out in the report to make it clearer and that he would like the Council to do more.

In response to a further question from Councillor Davies regarding wage inflation the Strategic Director of Resources advised that the local government pay award had not yet been agreed and that in the future they would look to assume a 2.5% increase. Furthermore, he confirmed that there were a large number of vacancies and that Local Authorities didn't always compete on salaries and therefore they may need to consider increasing wages for some roles.

Councillor Tucker asked whether they would be reviewing the investment portfolios. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that the treasury management strategy is reviewed annually and that the portfolio was under constant review. He also confirmed that some of the fund managers would be invited to present at a Members Briefing.

Proposed by Councillor Robinson and Seconded by Councillor Percy.

Councillor Percy commended the report and the hard work that had gone into the estimates despite the large number of uncertainties.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

- RESOLVED**
- a) Approve the Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26 as set out in this report and appendices**
 - b) Continue with the Business Rates pooling agreement, until such time as the Section151 Officer may determine.**

SRC.031 Leadership Gloucestershire Update

The Chair advised that a briefing note had been produced and would be circulated following the meeting.

Councillor Turner asked whether the climate change group would have budget for delivering projects. The Chief Executive advised that it was likely any budgetary requirements would be taken back to the equivalent of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee for consideration.

SRC.032 Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC)

The report was circulated prior to Committee. There were no questions.

SRC.033 Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)

The report was circulated prior to Committee. There were no questions.

SRC.034 Regeneration and Investment Board

The Chair advised that the meeting had been postponed and provided an update on the Levelling Up Taskforce which had met for the first time. The Levelling Up Taskforce would be looking to develop a bid to the Government's Levelling Up Fund which will focus on the enhancement of Stroud Town Centre's Wallbridge area, the railway station and Cheapside. Progress would be reported via the Regeneration and Investment Board to the Committee.

Further information was provided regarding the Canal Project and the public consultation event that had been held at Stonehouse Court Hotel, the Chair advised Members to look at the Cotswold Connected website for further details on timelines.

A briefing session had been held for Members regarding the bid for the fusion power plant. They were hoping to hear soon to see if it had been shortlisted.

SRC.035 **Brimscombe Port Update**

The chair outlined further developments since the briefing note had been published including:

- All 3 tenants had vacated the Brimscombe Port site and Stroud District Council had instructed One Legal to cease all legal proceedings
- The Council had not been invoicing RUSH or Grace Network for their rent and service charges since the end of their leases. The Group Leaders had been consulted and it had been agreed that no rent or service charges will be sought from RUSH or Grace Network covering the period from the end of their lease to them vacating the site.
- The marketing for developers was due to go live and Members were encouraged to watch the video which had been published.

Good progress had been made around community engagement and all residents would receive a leaflet.

SRC.036 **Water Source Heat Pumps**

The report was circulated prior to Committee.

SRC.037 **Member Questions**

There were none.

SRC.038 **Work Programme**

Council Davies asked whether an update on the Climate Change objectives could be brought to Strategy and Resources Committee. The Chair confirmed that there may be potential to look at specific topics at Strategy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED **To note the updates to the Work Programme.**

The meeting closed at 9.07 pm

Chair