



Members Questions to Council.

Question from Councillor Christopher Evans

Question 1

It is being advertised that The Pulse will be closed from 30th Oct 6th November for a new heating system to be installed. Whilst this is necessary work, it means an important service will be closed during half term week. Was the timing taken into consideration and could other dates have been chosen instead?

Reply 1

The installation of carbon saving technology at The Pulse in Dursley is part of a Council investment project with a total value of £5.33m. It has been enabled by our hard work and successful application for grant support from Salix (on behalf of the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero), of £4.691m. The scheme also includes Stratford Park Leisure Centre and The Museum in the Park. Once completed, this will result in an estimated annual carbon saving of 222 tonnes per year over the 20-year life of the equipment.

A requirement of the funding award, which was announced in January 2023, is that all work is completed by 31 March 2024.

The nature of the work makes it necessary for some periods of closure at each facility. While working to meet this exacting timescale, the programme has been planned to minimise disruption and impact on our communities. The dates for the closure of The Pulse were given careful consideration and although other dates were considered, the overall delivery schedule requires work be carried out between the 30 October and 6 November.

Works have been staggered so The Pulse and Stratford Leisure Centre are not closed at the same time. The pool at Stratford Park Leisure Centre will remain open during half-term and similarly, the Pulse will remain open when work is undertaken at Stratford Park Leisure Centre. There are banners up in The Pulse showing how to get to Stratford Park.

Delays to work at The Pulse would put pressure on the delivery of the overall scheme. The Pulse staff have made every effort to provide off-site children's activities during the closure period with activity days and dance workshops taking place at the Chantry centre in Dursley.

Activities include a Halloween Dance workshop: "A wickedly fun dance workshop where you will have the opportunity to learn a spooky Halloween dance routine."

And there is a Halloween Activity Day: "A day that's jam-packed with sports challenges, special Halloween-themed activities and crafts."

The swimming lessons are attended much less in the holiday period; it's not uncommon for no one to come along. October half term is particularly quiet as people tend to go away before Christmas and statistics show that numbers actually drop during the half term:

Week before half term – Total Footfall – 4522 (+500 School children)

Oct Half Term 2022 (24th Oct to 30th Oct) – Total Footfall 4281

Week after half term – Total Footfall – 4654 (+500 School children)

Disabled users come as part of schools, the Pulse work closely with many SEN schools, for example Cotswold Chine, Shrubberies, Hartmore. The Chine is there almost every day.

We have to remember that lots of people use the Pulse, for whom school holidays either do not signify, or actively make the leisure centre more difficult to access. Often classes don't go on during half term e.g. Cardiac and Cancer, Move it or Lose it, Respiratory Rehab. There are many elderly users, as well as families with pre-school children and babies, who find it more difficult to park during the school holidays.

Although general public pool activities will only be available at Stratford Park during half term, the closure at this time means our school Learn-to-Swim programme, which caters for approximately 500 children a week, will not be disrupted.

Question from Councillor Loraine Patrick

Question 2

As we are yet again looking to recruit a Senior Enforcement officer, are the numbers of enforcement cases stacking up again? How is this being addressed?

Reply 2

The post of Senior Enforcement Officer has been vacant since August 2023 and, following several recruitment campaigns across a range of media, we now have suitable candidates and hope to recruit to the role through an interview process, scheduled for early November 2023.

This vacancy reflects a particularly challenging environment for the recruitment and retention of planning and enforcement roles at the present time, not just in SDC but in neighbouring authorities and indeed nationwide.

Over the period that this post has been vacant, the Council's Development Management Team has been managing the enforcement caseload proactively, through a combination of team members covering wider duties and the targeted use of agency enforcement staff to work on priority cases. Through this proactive approach, the team closed more enforcement referrals during August and September than it received. The backlog in enforcement cases is also down overall, having reduced by over 50% since early May 2023.

Once the Senior Enforcement Officer post is filled, the team will continue to progress wider initiatives to reduce the backlog still further, for example through a repeat of the highly successful 'Enforcement Week' held in May 2023, focused on closing down long-standing cases. The publication of the Planning Enforcement Protocol in January 2023 has also put a renewed focus on the timely processing of enforcement referrals and empowered enforcement staff to apply planning judgement in their decision making.

Questions from Councillor Lindsey Green

Question 3

Can you tell us how many external funding opportunities there have been open to Stroud District Council over the last 2 years and out of that list how many have we applied for?

Reply 3

The Council has a successful track record of applying for grant funding to support the delivery of core Council services and the priorities within the Council Plan.

The Statement of Accounts give the totals of external funding received and these total £22.6 million over the last two years, including £5m in Central Government Covid support for the Council.

Many of the external funding opportunities arising for the Council are based on competitive bidding processes. SDC Officers look to explore any opportunities for additional funding which may be available, as long as it supports the existing priorities of the Council. Bidding for external funding, and delivering on grant funded programmes, is often complex and time consuming so

a key part of bidding is ensuring that grants targeted are those which sufficiently support Council activity. The Council's Leadership and Management Team have recently developed an updated set of operational guidance to ensure that grants are correctly targeted, recorded and reported.

Over the last two financial years the total received from competitive grant funding programmes is £13.2 million. These includes schemes where SDC has acted as the lead partner for County wide partnerships. Please refer to the following table for details of grants successfully acquired.

	£k
Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1&2	3,524
Green Homes LADS3	514
Home Upgrade Grant 1&2	1,235
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	522
WECA 2030	175
Local Authority Housing Fund	2,392
LTA Tennis	102
Salix – Heating for Leisure Centres and Museum	4,691
	13,155

The abundance of external funding possibilities and sources mean that a complete list of funding opportunities that would have been available is not practically possible, but the list of funding received is constantly updated and further updates will come to relevant policy committees as part of the budget monitoring process.

Question 4

Will Stroud District Council be putting a funding bid together for projects that have district heating now that the Heat Network Efficiency Scheme Round 5 is now open to help with the Council's goals for decarbonisation?

Reply 4

Heat Network Efficiency Scheme funding has been previously considered as the Council has five district heating systems within our Independent Living schemes. A project reviewing the infrastructure and metering options for the district heat systems is currently underway, and this will include seeing if it would be possible to submit a funding bid to this grant scheme.