



STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 5 October 2023

7.00 - 8.56 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Catherine Braun (Chair)

Councillor Beki Aldam
 * Councillor Gordon Craig
 Councillor Stephen Davies
 Councillor Nick Hurst
 * Councillor Lindsey Green
 * Councillor Robin Layfield
 * Absent

Councillor Natalie Bennett (Vice-Chair)

* Councillor Keith Pearson
 Councillor Steve Robinson
 Councillor Mattie Ross
 Councillor Ashley Smith
 Councillor Ken Tucker
 Councillor Chloe Turner

Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive

Strategic Director of Resources

Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer)

Democratic Services & Elections Manager

Head of Service Counter Fraud and
 Enforcement Unit

Accountancy Manager

Head of Property Services

Regeneration Delivery Lead

Head of Housing Solutions

Community Services Manager

Corporate Policy and Governance
 Manager

Others in Attendance

Programme Manager for Domestic Abuse Housing in Gloucestershire

SRC.013 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Craig, Green, Layfield and Pearson.

SRC.014 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

SRC.015 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meetings held on 11 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

SRC.016 Public Questions

There were none.

SRC.017 Member Questions

There were none.

SRC.018 Canalside Site, A419, Stonehouse

The Head of Property Services introduced the report that followed a Motion to Council in 2022 which requested that options on the site were brought back to Committee. Consultancy work was procured with the costs being met from the General Fund Regeneration Reserve. The first stage carried out was consultation and engagement with stakeholders in the local community in order to identify any common ground, the outcome was detailed in Appendix B. Housing Committee had considered the Onion Collective report in Appendix B in June 2023. The Onion Collective report advised that relationships needed to be rebuilt and the community needed additional support and guidance to move forward. The next steps were laid out on page 17 of Appendix B.

Housing Committee had approved the removal of the site from the Council's New Build Programme and recommended the appropriation of the site to the General Fund at market value. In order to mitigate against the loss of the site to the HRA and those in housing need the Housing Committee also recommended that the capital funding and capital receipt from any appropriation be earmarked for future investment in the local area. The decision to appropriate the site had to be done at market value and should be regarded as a major financial contribution to community development within Stonehouse. The site was valued at £450K by an independent valuer. The report also recommended that the Committee, agreed in principal, that an option would be offered to a properly constituted organisation, for the freehold or long leasehold interest in the site subject to a further report to the committee and set out a number of conditions including establishing a Working Group.

Councillor Hurst asked why the valuation of the site had decreased. The Head of Property Services advised that the previous valuation was over a year old, the markets had since changed and therefore the updated value reflected current market conditions.

In response to a question from Councillor Davies the Head of Property Services advised that the decision in the report set out a clear recommendation of groups that should be consulted and engaged with going forward.

Councillor Robinson asked whether they could have assurance that the funds being earmarked for future investment in the area would be ringfenced solely for the building of new housing or repairs on affordable housing. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that how the fund was allocated in the budget would likely be part of a future report to Housing Committee, however there was a clear intention that the fund should be used for additional affordable housing and not invested in current stock.

Proposed by Councillor Ross and seconded by Councillor Turner.

Councillor Turner was impressed with the work carried out and was pleased to see recommended outcomes that reflected the shared objectives of the community and tied closely to the Council Plan. She hoped that the Council could learn from the project and the community engagement carried out.

Councillor Hurst confirmed that he would support the decision however raised a note of caution based on the current position of the emerging local plan and the removal of the site which was currently allocated for housing.

Councillor Braun advised that it had been a journey to get to this point however was pleased that it was coming forward and was excited to see what options the working group would develop.

Councillor Ross highlighted the important and complex decision the Committee were being asked to make, she advised that the report helped to ensure that tenants of the Stroud district would not miss out on new social housing. She also stated that further consultation with businesses, charities, the social sector, young people and the local neighbourhood would give Stonehouse the opportunity to come together and work together to take things forward.

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

RESOLVED

- a) **To appropriate the Canalside Site , A419, Stonehouse as shown in the plan at Appendix A to this report from the Housing Revenue Account into the General Fund at market value.**
- b) **That the capital funding allocated to the Canalside site in the HRA New Build programme and the receipt to the HRA from this appropriation be earmarked for future investment in affordable housing in the local area.**
- c) **To agree in principle that an option will be offered to an appropriately constituted organisation for the freehold or long leasehold interest in the site for community use subject to a further report to this Committee and the following conditions being met within the next 18 months:**
 - a. **That a Working Group is established for the site with representatives from Stonehouse Town Council, community representatives and Stroud District Council (alongside other key stakeholders), which will move towards establishing or nominating a constituted community anchor organisation that could enter into an option for the freehold or leasehold interest in the site.**
 - b. **That the working group:**
 - i. **agrees the shared community outcomes that will be delivered from future uses of the site based on the Onion Collectives report attached at Appendix B and incorporates these into its terms of reference.**
 - ii. **undertakes further consultation with sections of the community who have been insufficiently involved to date; that is, young people, businesses, charities/social sector and the Bridgend community and undertakes open public engagement once concept designs for the site are in place following good practice in undertaking this consultation.**

- iii. **submits a business case to the Head of Property Services which sets out/includes:**
 - 1. **the proposed future use of the site.**
 - 2. **a formal pre-app response from the local planning authority that supports an illustrative development scheme for the site.**
 - 3. **the proposed organisation that will enter into an option.**
 - 4. **a business plan to include (but not limited to) viability of the proposed scheme , any consideration offered for the site, funding options, risk analysis and quantifies where possible, the social, economic and environmental benefits of the proposal.**
 - 5. **sets out how this site will link the Canal to Stonehouse and Bridgend and vice versa as well as to other canal side sites within Stonehouse.**
 - 6. **feedback from the community consultation and engagement undertaken.**

And

- c. **that any disposal complies with s123 of the Local Government Act 1972 by securing the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area.**

SRC.019 Update on asset review of Old Town Hall Stroud

The Regeneration Delivery Lead introduced the report which sought approval to market and subsequently enter into a long lease for the Old Town Hall in Stroud whilst retaining the freehold of the historic Grade II* listed building. The Regeneration Delivery Lead provided an update on the current use of the building and advised that there had been a loss of income for many years and that the building would need investment to maintain its current fabric and to refurbish it to modern standards to help meet the CN2030 commitments.

The Regeneration Delivery Lead confirmed that the Council did not have an operational need for the building apart from to ensure that the market traders had storage space and to ensure that the hall remained available for public hire. The hall was accepted as an Asset of Community Value in 2016, this had now expired, however careful consideration needed to be given due to the clear strength of feeling locally about the community value and protection given by the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

An interested party had been made aware that to offer a long lease the Council would need to seek Committee approval and the opportunity would need to be marketed and offered to the community. A guide price of £315k had been obtained for the building. Interested parties would be encouraged to set out their proposals for refurbishment and improvements to the energy efficiency.

It was recommended that expressions of interest from the Community were sought before a period of marketing. Should no community groups come forward it was proposed that Officers would agree terms with the successful bidder and complete a lease to bring the

building back into full use. Should an offer be received from the community a further report would be brought to Committee.

In response to Councillor Robinson the Regeneration Delivery Lead confirmed that it would be a full repairing lease and that they would ensure that there was no adverse impacts on the traders of the Shambles Market and that adhoc arrangements they had would be considered.

Councillor Hurst raised concerns about the requirement to improve the energy efficiency of the Grade II* building. The Regeneration Delivery Lead advised that they were conscious of the CN2030 commitments however would be using a 60/40 split in terms of quality and price.

Proposed by Councillor Turner and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Hurst stated that it would be difficult to bring the building up to energy efficient standards and that this was a problem for all listed buildings. He confirmed that he would however support taking it forward.

Councillor Bennett advised that it was a great opportunity to gain investment into the building and was pleased to hear that there would be no impact on the market.

Councillor Turner stated that the building was a landmark part of the architecture of the centre of Stroud and was pleased that they had found an approach that meant the Council was not disposing of it but would help to ensure it was kept in use, its heritage maintained and the building refurbished.

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

RESOLVED TO Delegate authority to the Head of Property Services:

- a) **To invite expressions of interest from community interest groups in acquiring a long leasehold interest in the Old Town Hall, Stroud allowing a six-week period for these to be submitted.**
- b) **At the end of the six week period, to offer a long leasehold interest in the property on the open market inviting bids from community and commercial organisations for a period of up to 6 months and following marketing to either: I. Report back to committee should any bids be received from community organisations, and seek approval to the preferred bidder or II. If no bids are received from community organisations, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Chair and Vice Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, decide on the successful bidder, agree terms and enter into a lease for the building.**
- c) **Any lease will be subject to the continuing use of the hall by the public and the leases of the stores to Shambles market traders.**

SRC.020 Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Penalty and Prosecution Policy

The Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit introduced the report and confirmed that the team were responsible for undertaking investigations of the Council Tax Support Scheme, they also acted as the liaison with the Department for Work and Pensions to assist them with any investigations regarding legacy housing benefit claims and supported reviews of single person discount. The Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit confirmed that they carried out this work for all six councils within the partnership and they had therefore produced one policy to be used by all of the councils. She confirmed that there had been no significant changes to the policy as it was based on legislation.

Proposed by Councillor Aldam and seconded by Councillor Robinson.

Councillor Aldam and Robinson offered their support for the report.

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

- RESOLVED TO**
- a) **Adopt the Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Penalty and Prosecution Policy.**
 - b) **To delegate to the Strategic Director of Resources to approve future minor amendments to the Policy in consultation with the Revenue and Benefits Manager and the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit.**

SRC.021 Electric Vehicle charge point rollout project - SDC Car Parks

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which would provide Electric Vehicle (EV) charging assurance to local communities and offer residents who did not have off street parking the opportunity to switch to EV vehicles. The plans were primarily aimed at local residents but would also cater for visitors allowing top up charge. The Community Services Manager highlighted the planned rollout included in paragraph 4.6 and confirmed that they were recommending the use of Stroud District Council funding for 50% of the expected project costs with the other 50% being funded by central government grants.

In response to a question from Councillor Davies regarding timescales the Community Services Manager confirmed that it had taken some time to get to this point however they had been keen to first get a strategy in place. He also confirmed that they had an expectation that the first charging points would be installed in 2023.

Councillor Hurst asked whether there were any specific reasons why some car parks had not been included in the scheme. The Community Services Manager advised that there was an element of capacity issue however this would be a phased rollout with further phases to follow which could include additional car parks.

Proposed by Councillor Turner and seconded by Councillor Hurst.

Councillor Hurst welcomed the report and advised that he looked forward to the charging points being installed and hoped the project could be taken forward on further car parks.

Councillor Braun was pleased to see the report come forward which would help to provide an opportunity for people to charge their vehicles locally.

Councillor Turner thanked the Community Services Manager for their work on bringing the report forward and was pleased that passive supply was included in many of the car parks which would help to future proof it.

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

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL **that £196k be added to the 2023/24 Capital Programme for the rollout of electric vehicle chargepoints in car parks.**

SRC.022 Domestic Abuse Strategy Statement

The Head of Housing Solutions introduced the report and confirmed that the Programme Manager for Domestic Abuse Housing in Gloucestershire was also in attendance and would be able to answer questions.

The Head of Housing Solutions advised that the report was produced in response to a Motion at Full Council in April 2023. The report outlined the coordinated response Countywide. Gloucestershire County Council led on the necessary requirements and tier 2 authorities, including Stroud District Council, cooperated and worked with the County Council. Stroud District Council also worked closely with Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) and the Stroud Beresford Group. The Housing Advice Team also operated an automatic referral to GDASS. The Head of Housing Solutions provided a further update on support available including interim accommodation, refugees and support within the home.

Councillor Aldam asked whether the Cost of Living crisis had had an impact on domestic abuse. The Programme Manager for Domestic Abuse Housing confirmed that they had seen an impact as a result of the cost of living and that the personalisation funding included in the strategy was key to providing flexibility to respond to someone's immediate economic need.

Proposed by Councillor Aldam and seconded by Councillor Davies.

Councillor Davies, who had seconded the original Motion at Council, advised that he was pleased to see the comprehensive report which highlighted the joined-up work between the different authorities.

Councillor Turner stated that she was pleased to see a rural champion coordinator and the opportunity for a rural network to be developed.

Councillor Ross hoped that the report would raise awareness and advised that it helped to highlight the good work that had been carried out.

Councillor Aldam welcomed the report and advised that Women's Aid had carried out research that concluded that 73% of people in an abusive relationship said that the Cost of Living had made it harder for them to leave. She had also been impressed by how responsive Officers had been in her own Ward and urged everyone to support the report.

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

RESOLVED **To note the report**

SRC.023 **Council Plan 2021-2026 Refresh**

Councillor Braun, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, advised that the Council Plan had been originally approved in October 2021. The refreshed Council Plan had been considered at Environment, Housing and Community Services and Licensing Committees and no amendments were proposed. The refresh of the Council plan ensured that the Council was able to make adjustments and refinements based on the progress being made and respond to emerging or changing circumstances. The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee highlighted the key achievements in paragraph 2.4 of the report and confirmed that the progress against the whole Council Plan had been included in Appendix A. The recommended changes had been included in Appendix B which included improvements to milestones and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Turner was pleased to have the opportunity to review the Council Plan and to work with Officers to help tighten up KPIs further.

Councillor Davies confirmed that he supported the Council having a plan so that they could set out what they planned to do and measure progress against it. He advised that there were however still some challenges around the metrics and availability of data.

Councillor Tucker raised concerns with the monitoring of the plan and raised some points including the changing of dates. The Corporate Policy & Governance Manager advised that start dates, including any changes, were recorded on the performance management system (Ideagen) and that ongoing pieces of work that had an end date of the previous year were updated so that they could continue to monitor them.

Councillor Bennett thanked the Officers involved and advised she was pleased to see the good progress that had been made against the plan. She also provided assurance that the monitoring of the plan would be improved moving forward.

Councillor Braun also offered thanks to everyone who had been involved in the refresh of the Council Plan and confirmed that it would provide the Committee with an excellent evidence base for performance management and the new performance management system would allow all Members to pull off reports.

On being put to the vote the Motion was carried with 9 votes in favour and 1 abstention.

RECOMMENDED **That the refreshed Council Plan is approved**
TO COUNCIL

SRC.024 **Local Authority Housing Fund and HRA Acquisitions Budget**

The Accountancy Manager presented the report on behalf of the Head of Property Services and the Head of Housing Solutions. The need for a report had arisen following Housing Committees approval of an additional grant from central government for the Local Authority Housing Fund. An additional amount of £575k had been awarded to Stroud District Council for the additional purchase of 4 properties for resettlement schemes. The properties would remain in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) following the initial use

for the resettlement scheme. The report set out the additional funding being requested which would cover the additional 4 properties and included a rework of the entire HRA acquisitions budget to give further flexibility.

In response to a question from Councillor Hurst the Accountancy Manager advised that there was no specific budget provided for cultural adaptations however there was budgetary allowance for additional adaptations and they would therefore consider any requests put forward to them.

In response to a question from Councillor Robinson the Interim Accountancy Manager advised that future use of the property would be down to circumstances at the time, the timing and the requirements from the government on the use of the grant.

Proposed by Councillor Ross and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Ross advised that the report had received unanimous support at Housing Committee and that it was an easy decision for Members as the properties would eventually be released into the Councils housing stock.

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

RECOMMENDED THAT COUNCIL **Increase the HRA Property Acquisitions capital budget 2023/24 to £6.72m, as set out in this report and as recommended by Housing Committee.**

SRC.025 Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2023/24

The Accountancy Manager provided a brief overview of the report and highlighted the following:

- The General Fund position was included in Table 1 on page 124 and a further breakdown was available in the Appendices
- There was an underspend of £16k which was a good overall position for quarter 1
- Key variances had been included in the budget strategy
- Key variances included pressure in Housing Benefit costs, an under achievement of income in waste and recycling and an under achievement of income in carparks
- Additional investment income was expected
- The cost of utilities was not as high as expected at budget setting
- Section 5 set out the Quarter 1 HRA budget position, there was an expected net overspend of £122k with 3 main areas of variance including rent and service charges, repairs and maintenance and utilities
- Section 6 contained a summary of the Councils Capital Programme and a full breakdown was included in Appendix D

Councillor Davies asked whether the shortfall in car park revenue was due to the increase in car park charges. The Accountancy Manager advised that she wasn't aware that the shortfall related to the increase in prices but could provide further detail if needed. Councillor Davies advised he would be interested in seeing an analysis of what was causing the reduction in car parking income. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that they were currently carrying out analysis in order to look at the budgets for the following year. He advised that the initial work suggested that they had been too optimistic about how much car parking income would bounce back following the pandemic. They would be speaking with Stroud Town Council and the Chamber of Trade about these issues and they were already comparing usage with previous financial years. The

Strategic Director of Resources advised that in many car parks they had frozen the charges but in some there had been an increase higher than inflation, he was therefore interested to see whether this had any impact on behaviour.

Proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Braun thanked the Accountancy Manager for the report which provided a good overview.

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

RESOLVED

To:

- 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.026 Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28

The Strategic Director of Resources introduced the Budget Strategy and advised that this report traditionally marked the start of the budget setting process and was recommended to Council for their consideration. The Strategic Director of Resources highlighted the following key points:

- The report set out the key assumptions.
- The strategy recommended they continue the policy of increasing Council Tax at the referendum level of 2.99%.
- They would not propose any changes to Council Tax Support which currently provided up to 100% support.
- The New Homes Bonus grant had been relied upon for a number of years however it had not been confirmed for the following year.
- The government was clear that local government funding needed to be reformed.
- The Extended Producer Responsibility had been delayed for at least a year therefore no allocation had been included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- An assumption had been included that inflation would be around 5%, this had been factored into contracts for the following year.
- Pay had not yet been agreed for Local Government staff for 2023-24 year and therefore it was difficult to budget for 2024-25.
- Investment income interest rates remained higher than expected.
- It was recommended to set the increase in fees and charges at 5%.
- Appendix B included budget adjustments which had been agreed by Council or were major pressures that the Council was already aware of.
- The policy on the use of reserves had not changed.
- Major risks to the HRA had been included in the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Turner regarding additional costs from changes to planning e.g., biodiversity net gain and the local nature recovery strategy, the Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that nothing had been included in the budget strategy due to uncertainty. He confirmed that meetings would be held in due course to look at how to plan ahead for the changes and any additional costs.

Councillor Davies asked whether there was any expectation of increased costs for the Local Plan. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that nothing had been included in the budget strategy however they were very early on in the budget setting process and so would be working closely with Officers to ensure there would be an adequate budget.

Councillor Davies asked an additional question regarding staffing issues and hiring contractors. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that if any services were having issues with resourcing and needed to use agency staff this would be flagged at budget monitoring and more work would be carried out to see whether further resource was needed or whether it was a short-term issue.

Proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Bennett thanked the Strategic Director of Resources for the clear report and was pleased to see a positive picture compared to the financial status of other local authorities.

Councillor Hurst expressed concerns that the budget strategy did not include consideration of additional funds for the Local Plan.

Councillor Braun thanked Officers for the report and highlighted the difficulties caused by the levels of uncertainty with local government funding.

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

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL **To approve the Budget Strategy and Draft MTFP 2023/24 to 2027/28 as set out in this report and appendices.**

SRC.027 **Member / Officer Reports (To Note)**

a) Performance Management

There were no questions.

b) Leadership Gloucestershire Update

There were no questions.

c) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC)

Councillor Davies asked whether the Local Plan and Motorway junctions were discussed. Councillor Braun advised that she raised it at Leadership Gloucestershire to highlight that this was an ongoing piece of work which would be relevant to everyone in the County. The Chief Executive confirmed that meetings had been arranged with Gloucestershire County Council and South Gloucestershire Council.

d) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)

There were no questions.

e) Regeneration and Investment Board

There were no questions.

SRC.028 Work Programme

Councillor Davies asked whether an update on the Local Plan and financial implications could be provided to the Committee. The Chief Executive advised that when they knew exactly what they were facing they would bring reports to the appropriate committee.

RESOLVED To note the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 8.56 pm

Chair