



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

07 April 2022

7.00 - 8.44 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Doina Cornell (Chair)

Councillor Chris Brine
Councillor Stephen Davies
Councillor Nick Hurst
Councillor Martin Percy
Councillor Keith Pearson
Councillor Gordon Craig*

*= Absent

Councillor Catherine Braun (Vice-Chair)

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

Councillor Nicholas Housden*

Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive
Strategic Director of Resources
Strategic Director of Place
Monitoring Officer

Senior Democratic Services & Elections
Officer
Accountancy Manager

SRC.075 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Craig and Housden.

SRC.076 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

SRC.077 Minutes

RESOLVED To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022.

SRC.078 Public Question Time

There were none.

SRC.079 Levelling Up Bid - Use of Business Rates Pilot Funding

The Strategic Director of Place brought Members attention to the summary provided in Appendix 1. He advised that the bid was being put together with a number of strategic

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Subject to approval at
next meeting

partners and encompassed a range of projects. The Strategic Director of Place advised that the funding being sought tonight through this report would enable the Council to submit a strong bid before the 6 July deadline. It was also confirmed that Stroud District Council was a priority two area and that priority one areas, Gloucester City Council and Forest of Dean District Council, received investment to help develop their bid which Stroud would not receive. The Strategic Director of Place reiterated paragraph 4.1 and confirmed that there would be no guarantee that they would be successful with their bid and that they could qualify for other external funding instead.

Councillor Robinson asked about the bus service and the poor infrastructure in Merrywalks and whether there would be any funding through the Levelling Up Bid. The Strategic Director of Place confirmed that Stroud District Council were working very closely with Gloucestershire County Council and that their focus for this bid had been on active travel.

Councillor Davies asked for confirmation as to whether there were still people awaiting confirmation of whether their project had been included in the bid. The Strategic Director of Place confirmed that a finite list of projects had been compiled in Appendix 1, however it was also advised that there may be projects that would not get selected for submission with the bid and that the partners were aware of this reality.

Councillor Percy asked whether partners such as Great Western Railway would contribute their own funds to the project to show their commitment. The Strategic Director of Place confirmed that there were specific rail industry funding streams that they would be seeking support from including station improvement funds.

Councillor Hurst expressed concerns that the package presented was very Stroud centric and asked whether it was a reflection of the projects that had been put forward for the bid. The Strategic Director of Place Project confirmed that the bid was specifically for investment in physical infrastructure, there was strict guidance about providing 'pride of place'. Therefore, if successful, a lot of the investment would be in Stroud Town but the benefits of it would be spread much wider.

Councillor Pearson asked for clarification as to whether Stroud District Council were solely liable for the cost of the feasibility study for accessibility to Stroud Train Station. The Strategic Director of Place confirmed that Stroud District Council would be funding the feasibility study however Network Rail were providing their time.

Proposed by Councillor Davies and seconded by Councillor Braun.

Councillor Pearson expressed concern over the amount of money that would be spent with no guarantee of receiving any funding in return however advised that the improvements that would be made if the funding was received would be good.

Councillor Brine expressed similar concerns raised by Councillor Pearson. However, he offered his support as this would ensure that the bids would be ready for submission for any future funding projects if they were unsuccessful with the Levelling Up Bid.

Councillor Turner shared their intent to support the bid as they believed this would ensure projects were prioritised and Stroud District Council could look to deliver alternative funding to those projects if the Levelling Up Bid was not successful.

The Chair confirmed that the Strategic Director of Place and the team working on the bid had a good track record at putting these projects together, delivering to a high standard and winning previous bids.

Councillor Davies expressed thanks to the Strategic Director of Place and the team for their work. Councillor Davies confirmed that having bid-ready pieces of work would be valuable beyond the Levelling Up bid and provided reassurance that previously, every bid put forward by Gloucestershire had received funding.

Councillor Braun highlighted the focus on walking and cycling and improvements to the train station in the bid. Councillor Braun confirmed that they believed it would benefit residents from wider areas of the District than just Stroud.

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

RESOLVED To approve the allocation of up to £275k from Business Rates Pilot funding, to support project development costs related to the forthcoming Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid.

SRC.080 Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2021/22

The Accountancy Manager introduced the Budget Monitoring Report for Q3 which covered the expected financial position of the year 2021/22 and brought Members attention to the following key areas:

General Fund

- Table 1 showed an expected underspend of £396k, with the main changes from Q2 being the Covid-19 impact, waste and recycling, housing benefit and ICT.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- Expected to have an overspend of £836k, the main areas of pressure were rents and service charges and repairs and maintenance.

Capital Programme

- There had been areas of slippage within the Capital Programme in particular with the Canal, Multi Service Contract Vehicles, Cycling and Walking Plan and Brimscombe Port.
- The Water Source Heat Pumps had cost slightly more than expected at Q2 and this was being reviewed.
- HRA had a small overspend overall and further details would be taken to Housing Committee.
- A breakdown of Service Committees and Covid summary could be found in the appendixes.

Councillor Davies asked for clarification over the overspend for ICT. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken to gain a better understanding of the contracts in place and there was an increased expectation in the budget for next year. The Chief Executive provided further confirmation that the IT team had audited the software that had been purchased and the budgets were showing that they were starting to get on top of this.

In response to questions the Accountancy Manager confirmed that:

- The pressure on the HRA caused by voids was a net loss of income of £451k.
- They were investigating why the number of tenants leaving properties remained high.
- In terms of the properties sold at Littlecombe, the sale prices had covered the borrowing costs.
- They were looking to learn lessons regarding the uninsured costs listed in paragraph 5.7 and insurance would be reviewed to check it was appropriate.

Councillor Ross asked whether the burden of the cost of lateral flow tests could be lessened for Stroud District Council staff or whether tests could be provided to Community Hubs. The Chief Executive confirmed that it was a question that they had considered and that they would be providing lateral flow tests to front line staff. They had also asked Group Leaders for their thoughts as the cost of providing tests to all staff would be approximately £5k a week.

Proposed by Councillor Brine and seconded by Councillor Turner.

Councillor Davies expressed concerns about the underspend and stated that one of the reasons for underspend was staff vacancies. Staff vacancies overstretched teams and it was important that the council paid attention to this.

Councillor Hurst brought Members attention to the issue with void properties and wondered whether bringing the housing maintenance service in house had been a contributing factor. Councillor Ross confirmed that void work was carried out by contractors rather than in house and that there was more than one issue causing the problems with void properties.

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.081 Debt Write Off

The Strategic Director of Resources introduced the report which showed the arrears owed by Rush Skatepark from their time at Brimbscombe Port. The Strategic Director of Resources provided a timeline of events from 2018 and confirmed that Rush Skatepark were now going through liquidation. Rush Skatepark owed a total of £90k, he was asking for permission to write off the debt so that the Council could close the position in the accounts for year end.

Councillor Hurst asked whether this information could now be discussed in the public domain as it had previously been considered exempt. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that previously they hadn't disclosed any amounts that were owed and that companies house now showed their current position so it could be discussed in public. It was important that the Council could now be transparent about the amounts they had put in.

In response to Councillor Turner the Strategic Director of Resources confirmed he would speak with the liquidator to confirm whether the Council would be added to the list of creditors despite writing off the current debt.

Proposed by Councillor Brine and seconded by Councillor Ross.

Councillor Robinson advised that he would be reluctantly supporting it and that it was a large amount to write off which could have covered funds for youth work.

Councillor Davies also confirmed that he would reluctantly support it but wanted to make sure that it wasn't taken as a sign that the Council wouldn't be supportive of any future skateparks in the district.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a) **Write off the Sums Owed by Rush Skatepark Ltd as shown in Table 1**
 - b) **Authorise the Strategic Director of Resources to make minor amendments to the sums written off as required.**

SRC.082 Member/Officer Reports (To Note)

a) **Performance Monitoring**

Councillor Pearson introduced the performance monitoring report which was the first of the new format. He stated that they needed to consider a better way to report on projects that were on target and that milestones should be added.

The Strategic Director of Resources advised that although Councillor Housden was listed on the report he was unable to attend the performance monitoring meeting.

Councillor Cornell commented that some of the projects that said they had not been started had been and that more information should be added to update these and refine the process.

Councillor Braun stated that the new report with a RAG status was an improvement and that more narrative could be included for deadlines that were closer.

Councillor Percy suggested the addition of another category for 'at risk' which would be for projects that were at risk of not hitting their targets.

b) **Leadership Gloucestershire Update**

Leadership Gloucestershire had not met therefore no update was provided.

c) **Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC)**

The Chair, Councillor Cornell, confirmed the report had been circulated. Councillor Braun asked whether there was any funding for the Tour of Britain. The Chief Executive advised that the route had only just been announced but the LEP thought that they may be able to do something for the mens tour in September but not in time for June.

d) **Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)**

Councillor Turner introduced the report which had been circulated.

e) **Regeneration and Investment Board**

The Strategic Director of Place advised that the Board had discussed the following issues:

- Levelling up fund guidance had been reviewed and compared to the emerging bid.
- The brief for a Stroud District Prospectus – a marketing tool to help the Council win external funding and showcase the districts priorities. Work on the prospectus would take place over the spring and summer.
- Highlight reports on One Public Estate, Brimscome Port and May Lane development.
- Tricorn house and the options to facilitate the redevelopment of that site.
- Details from Town and Parish Councils about projects in their areas and support that could be provided.

Councillor Percy asked that the prospectus didn't just focus on Stroud Town to make sure it was balanced across the whole district.

SRC.083 **Work Programme**

The Chair reminded members about the poll for the work programme planning meetings that had been circulated.

Additions to the work programme included Fit for the Future updates, Canal Report and the Equality Action Plan.

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

SRC.084 **Member Questions**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 8.44 pm

Chair