



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20 April 2023

7.00 - 8.38 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Catherine Braun (Chair)

- * Councillor Chris Brine
- Councillor Doina Cornell
- Councillor Gordon Craig
- Councillor Stephen Davies
- * Councillor Laurie Davies
- Councillor Lindsey Green
- *Absent

Councillor Natalie Bennett (Vice-Chair)

- Councillor Martin Percy
- Councillor Keith Pearson
- Councillor Mattie Ross
- Councillor Ken Tucker
- Councillor Chloe Turner

Officers in Attendance

- Chief Executive
- Strategic Director of Resources
- Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer)
- Senior Democratic Services & Elections Officer

- Accountancy Manager
- Property Manager
- Senior Policy and Governance Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

- Councillor Nick Hurst

SRC.147 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brine, Laurie Davies and Percy.

SRC.148 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

SRC.149 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meetings held on 2 February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

SRC.150 Public Questions

There were none.

SRC.151 **Member Questions**

There were none.

SRC.152 **Procurement Strategy Review**

The Senior Policy and Governance Officer introduced the report and advised that the current Procurement Strategy had been approved in 2019 and was now due for renewal. The recommended review would help to ensure that the new strategy aligned with the Council Plan and the National Procurement Strategy which had been published in 2022. She drew Members attention to section 2 which detailed the approach they hoped to follow.

Councillor Stephen Davies asked how they could ensure that the procurement strategy was followed. The Senior Policy and Governance Officer confirmed that a report was taken to Audit and Standards Committee on an annual basis where any issues or possible improvements could be raised and discussed.

In response to questions from Councillor Braun it was confirmed that the results of the LGA and Talent, Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) Self-assessments could be reported back to Councillors and that the new corporate governance group would also be involved with the review. It was also confirmed that Members would be involved with setting any performance monitoring objectives.

Councillor Pearson asked for clarification on the key differences between the current strategy and the National Procurement Strategy. The Senior Policy and Governance Officer confirmed that the themes within the National Procurement Strategy had not changed however the examples of actions that the council should be undertaking in each theme had been altered and these would be considered as part of the review.

Councillor Green asked for assurance that appropriate KPIs would be put in place as suggested in section 2.1.6. The Senior Policy and Governance Officer advised that all objectives created would be SMART ensuring that they were achievable and measurable and that Members would be able to be involved with the process.

Proposed by Councillor Tuner and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Bennett, Braun and Turner thanked Officers for the report and advised that they were looking forward to seeing the outcome of the assessment later in the year.

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

RESOLVED **To approve the review to update the Council's Procurement Strategy.**

SRC.153 **Budget Monitoring Report Q3 2022/23**

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

- The General Fund was expected to have an overspend of £304k at end of year, highlighted in Table 1 on Page 18.

- Key variances had been listed in the report and were in line with previous budget reports.
- Revenue and Benefits expected an overspend of £415k largely due to Housing Benefit payments for higher cost supported housing. Additional budget had been allocated in 2023/24 to help address the issue.
- There were various pressures on the sports centres including the increase in cost of utilities.
- DCC income budget for next financial year has been reduced by £100k to reflect the reduction in planning income.
- The waste and recycling budget had been revised due to various pressures including the cost of bins and recycling receptacles.
- The Ubico contract was expecting an overspend.
- Adjustments had been made to the Planning Strategy and Housing Advice budgets for the next financial year.
- Budgets had been amended in 2023/24 to reflect the reduction in car parking revenue.
- The New Build area at Ebley Mill had been let, it would therefore not be a pressure on next year's budget.
- The budget for utilities had been adjusted in future to reflect the higher costs that the Council was experiencing.
- Corporate Expenditure and Income was showing a variance which was expected due to the difficulties in predicting spend.
- An estimated £500k of vacancy savings by the end of the year. Reasons for vacancies varied and included natural turnover, difficulty recruiting to positions and delaying recruitment in order to attract the right candidate or to make changes to the position.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) showed an expected overspend of £46k which was an improvement on the predictions highlighted at Q2.
- Rents and service charges and the reduction in void properties had helped to reduce the overspend.
- Some savings had been made due to vacancies.
- They were still seeing a high cost of labour and materials which would impact the budget.
- The increase in utilities had impacted independent living schemes and shared spaces such as in blocks of flats. This had been addressed in the budget for 2023/24.

In response to Councillor Turner, the Accountancy Manager confirmed that she would respond outside the meeting to provide further information regarding the slippage on the Stratford Park Lido.

Councillor Stephen Davies asked if there was anything more that could be done to reduce the number of vacancies, in particular for key posts such as the Neighbourhood Wardens. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that the HR team were working on recruitment and that some of the vacancies were due to natural turnover. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that they would be looking at the length of notice periods for certain posts and that a new member of the HR team was helping specifically with the council's recruitment. He confirmed that they would continue to look at ways to make sure that vacancy savings didn't turn into service impacts.

The Chair, Councillor Braun, asked for additional information regarding the budget for temporary accommodation. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that they had received

additional grant income and were now expecting an underspend. She advised that the budget had been significantly increased a few years ago with the intention of lowering it over coming years. She also advised that some of the Councils housing stock had been used as temporary accommodation which had helped to reduce costs and meant nicer living conditions for residents who required temporary accommodation.

Proposed by Councillor Turner and seconded by Councillor Ross.

Councillor Pearson raised concerns regarding the timing of the quarterly budget reports and questioned how Members would be informed quickly enough should there be any major problems. Councillor Braun stated that there was a difference between Members oversight and the day-to-day management, which was carried out by Officers, she also confirmed that the administration had regular meetings with Officers and would be able to alert members to any serious issues.

Councillor Ross and Turner commended the Accountancy Manager for the report.

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.154 Kingshill House

The Property Manager introduced the report and gave a brief background of Kingshill House. She advised that Kingshill House was currently run by the Kingshill House Ltd Charity and that the 25-year full repairing and insuring lease that had been granted in 1999 was due to expire in October 2024. She confirmed that Kingshill House was a surplus asset which the Council had no operational use for. It was advised that the Council currently provided Kingshill House Ltd with a general revenue grant on a sliding scale and that Strategy and Resources Committee had agreed a freeze in the grant reduction and an additional £20k grant. The Council had also released £17k over and above the grant funding to assist with urgent repairs to the drains in the 2022/23 financial year. The Property Manager recommended that negotiations should be entered into for a new short-term lease subject to a further report to Strategy and Resources Committee.

The Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer) highlighted the legal implications contained within the report and confirmed that the current lease benefitted from the rights to re-new the tenancy under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 and therefore there were limited grounds to oppose such renewal. Furthermore, she highlighted that there could be situations in which compensation would need to be paid.

Councillor Ross asked whether Kingshill House had received grants from Dursley Town Council or any other organisations. Councillor Cornell confirmed that Dursley Town Council had provided a small grant in the past. The Property Manager confirmed that she would seek further confirmation and respond to Councillor Ross outside of the meeting.

Councillor Turner asked if there was any further support that could be offered to the trust to help them bring forward the fully costed business plan. The Strategic Director of

Resources advised that there had been a large change over of personnel both on the Board and with the management team. However, both the new manager and Chair were highly experienced and had been very grateful for the Councils support so far.

In response to Councillor Stephen Davies the Property Manager confirmed that a condition survey had been carried out in 2019 by the Trust and prior to that by the Council, the condition survey suggested that the necessary works would cost approximately £400k - £500k over a 10-year period.

In response to a question regarding timings from Councillor Craig, the Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer) advised that they hoped to have made progress with the new lease by Christmas as they would need to give 6 months' notice for the end of the lease period.

The Chair, Councillor Braun, asked for further clarification on the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 which had been referred to in the legal implications. The Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer) advised that they would need to have particular grounds in order to end the lease, either mandatory grounds or discretionary grounds. If the Council wished to reoccupy the property this could be a mandatory ground and if the occupiers had not been keeping up with rent payments this could be considered a discretionary ground.

Councillor Pearson asked if there was any reason that a short-term lease couldn't be granted as the amount that was currently paid was low. The Property Manager advised that there were other terms and conditions that would need to be agreed not just the rent and that the process could be time consuming.

Councillor Craig asked for further information regarding any community benefit. The Property Manager confirmed that Kingshill House had been successfully run as a community centre for 20 years. Councillor Cornell, Ward Member for Dursley, advised that it was a valued community space which focused on the arts.

Councillor Green asked whether Kingshill House Ltd had contributed towards any repairs. The Property Manager confirmed that they had been successful in the past at applying for grants, but the Council had made significant contributions.

The Property Manager confirmed in response to Councillor Pearson that Kingshill House had been eligible for some grants during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Proposed by Councillor Cornell and seconded by Councillor Tucker.

Councillor Tucker stated that centres such as Kingshill House were a valuable community asset and drew on his own experiences of having learnt Spanish at the venue.

Councillor Stephen Davies advised that if they didn't negotiate the lease, they would be solely responsible for a property that required half a million pounds to bring it up to standard and if they did enter into a new lease they would probably end up contributing towards the repairs anyway.

Councillor Ross thanked the Property Manager for the report and drew on her own experiences having attended the venue previously.

Councillor Turner suggested that the property had been in worse condition at the start of the lease and that it was gradually being repaired to bring it back into good condition.

The Chair, Councillor Braun, stated that she had met with the trustees and employees at Kingshill House and that the Trust recognised that they were not in a position to take on the asset transfer. She acknowledged that it would be an important year for the Council and the Trust to ensure that there was a joint agreement on the best way forward for Kingshill House.

Councillor Cornell recognised the complexity of the issue but hoped that a new lease would help to provide some security to the Trust and encouraged everyone to look at the events schedule on the Kingshill House website.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a) **To note the current position in respect of Kingshill House**
 - b) **To note that a Community Asset Transfer is no longer feasible**
 - c) **To delegate authority to the Head of Property Services to enter into negotiations with Kingshill House Limited with a view to agreeing Heads of Terms for a revised Lease of Kingshill House;**
 - d) **That no Lease shall be entered into until such time as the Heads of Terms have been reported to and approved by the Strategy and Resources Committee**

SRC.155 Stroud Cemetery Chapel

The Property Manager introduced the report and confirmed that the cemetery had been transferred to Stroud Town Council in 2017 but the Chapel, a Grade II listed building, had been retained by the District Council. The Chapel was currently a vacant asset with no operational use. A previous decision by Strategy and Resources Committee had led to an agreement to dispose of the Chapel on the open market. Many objections were received following the advertising of the intention to dispose of the Chapel on the open market. Following the public consultation event in 2019, the Council offered the community time to formulate a proposal. In October 2020 Committee resolved to agree terms for a transfer of the Cemetery Chapel to the Stroud Preservation Trust (SPT) for £1 subject to detailed feasibility studies. Over the last 2 years the SPT commissioned a feasibility study and concluded that it wouldn't be financially viable to fully repair and convert the Chapel to best contemporary standards. However, the feasibility study suggested that short term uses would be possible if essential works (estimated at £29-50K) were carried out. The SPT had since approached the Council and requested a lease of between 5 and 7 years. They also advised that the works would only be possible with a Grant of £75K from the Council, this would allow the Trust to raise funds by using it as match funding.

Councillor Turner asked for further information regarding the £5k per annum for the planned maintenance programme which the SPT had asked the Council to continue paying. The Property Manager confirmed that it would cover a range of activity including electrical checks, graffiti removal, gutter and septic tank clearance.

Councillor Stephen Davies asked whether the SPT had advised what they had hoped to use the building for. The Property Manager advised that the use had not been decided but considerations were being made for exhibitions, pop up café's and open days etc. In response to a further question regarding the cost of repairs the Property Manager advised that the feasibility study had included all of the expected costs and that the building was in a relatively good condition but would require a lot of money for repairs and maintenance in the longer term.

In response to Councillor Craig, the Property Manager confirmed that they could build annual reviews of progress into the terms of lease and could look at this during the negotiations.

Councillor Pearson asked what the Council would need to do if they were unable to agree a further lease after 5 years. The Property Manager advised that they would consider all options but it would be likely that the Chapel would need to be put on the open market.

Proposed by the Chair, Councillor Braun, and seconded by Councillor Bennett

Councillor Turner drew Members attention to Paragraph 2.3 and stated that it was a fantastic opportunity to work with a dedicated Trust who would help to bring the building back into a useable condition.

Councillor Craig also confirmed he was happy to support the proposal and requested that Officers ensured that regular reviews took place to provide assurance that the required works were being carried out.

The Chair invited Councillor Hurst to speak during the meeting. Councillor Hurst advised the Committee that due to the position of the Chapel within the Cemetery it would be difficult to find alternative uses for the building. He stated that it was the responsibility of the Council to ensure the ongoing wellbeing of the building and that he was pleased that a workable scheme had been proposed.

Councillor Bennett thanked Officers for the report and was pleased that the opportunity proposed would allow time for the SPT and Council to consider further options for the building.

Councillor Braun advised that the community had clearly told the Council that they did not want the building to be sold on the open market and hoped that there would be a positive future with SPT.

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

- RESOLVED TO**
- a) **Grant a Lease of the Cemetery Chapel to the Stroud Preservation Trust on terms to be agreed by the Head of Property Services (subject to any objections received in response to the advertisement referred to in the legal implications being satisfactorily dealt with);**
 - b) **Subject to the advice from One Legal on Subsidy Control, agrees to use the Repairs and Replacements reserve to fund a Grant of £75,000 payable over a 5-year period to the Stroud Preservation Trust for essential works to the Cemetery Chapel during the Lease period; and**
 - c) **Delegate authority to the Director of One Legal in consultation with the Head of Property Services and the Director of Resources to enter into the relevant legal documents in respect of the Lease and Grant funding.**

SRC.156 Member / Officer Reports (To Note)

a) Performance Management

Councillor Tucker asked to speak with the Strategic Director of Resources outside the meeting regarding missing information within the report, he wanted to ensure that if projects were overdue that detail was included to confirm new timescales.

Councillor Turner echoed Councillor Tucker's comments and stated that the Committee needed an additional Performance Monitor due to the low attendance at the Performance Monitoring meetings.

The Strategic Director of Resources advised that he believed an additional Performance Monitor was needed and that they could appoint Members at the next Committee Meeting. He also gave credit to the Youth Council Members who had attended the meeting. He advised Members that this would be the last report from the Excelsis system and reports going forward would be produced from the new Pentana Performance Management system. He reminded Members of the training dates for Pentana.

Councillor Braun asked whether the reports would be more up to date once they had switched to using Pentana. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that he hoped this would be the case but there would be time needed to ensure they could hold a Performance Monitoring meeting and draft the report.

Councillor Green drew Members attention to the items which contained 'target under review' and asked for an update to be provided. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that some of the projects were not yet underway but a full review of KPIs and Milestones was going to take place in consultation with Members to ensure that they had set measurable targets.

Councillor Pearson gave his apologies and left the meeting.

Councillor Craig requested that they look at CW3 and ER3 during the next Performance Monitoring Meeting.

b) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) - 9 February and 15 March 2023

There were no questions.

c) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)

There were no questions.

d) Canal Update

There were no questions.

e) Fit For the Future Update

There were no questions.

f) Regeneration and Investment Board

There were no questions.

g) Leadership Gloucestershire

There were no questions.

SRC.157 Work Programme

The Chair confirmed that it was hoped that the report regarding Community Wealth Building would be brought to the July Committee and advised that they expected an additional report regarding the Bath Place site.

RESOLVED To note the above update to the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 8.38 pm

Chair