

Stroud District Councillors' Report

August 2020

Audit & Standards committee meeting – 25 August

The Committee discussed and agreed proposed amendments to the **code of conduct** for members and the arrangements under which allegations can be investigated ([link](#)). All SDC meetings are now being shared on You Tube - [link](#)

Local Government reorganisation proposals

The Government has announced that a recovery and devolution white paper will be published later this year. This is expected to propose a move towards unitary councils, combined authorities and elected mayors. The County Council network and District Council Networks have recently issued reports on the issue ([CCN report](#) and [DCN Report](#)). Stroud District Council is working with Cotswold District Council and Cheltenham Borough Council to explore options for Gloucestershire ([press release](#)).

A full meeting of Stroud District Council has been called for 7 September to discuss the issue of local government reorganisation ([link](#)).

Reforms to the Planning System

On 6 August the government unveiled a major consultation on changes to the planning system in England ([link](#)) which would see a significant change in the involvement in Councils in planning. The four main proposals are

- changes to the standard method for assessing local housing need
- securing of First Homes through developer contributions in the short term until the transition to a new system
- supporting small and medium-sized builders by temporarily lifting the small sites threshold below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing
- extending the current Permission in Principle to major development

SDC Planning Officers are considering the implications of the proposals and how the council might respond to the consultation. There will be further briefings for councillors in the coming weeks on these proposals and potential impact for our Local Plan review.

Annual Budget and Satisfaction Consultation with Residents and Local Businesses

Over the past ten years SDC has undertaken annual consultation with residents and businesses. The surveys consist of ten minute telephone interviews with 500 local residents randomly selected from across the district, broken down into clustered wards reflecting the population and demographics; and 200 local businesses, 140 of which have 10 or less employees. The survey is conducted by an independent market research company. This year the consultation with residents will run from mid August until mid September, followed by a survey with local businesses. Results are expected mid-November.

Draft Climate Strategy and Action Plan

In late September SDC will be launching a draft strategy setting out the actions required to deliver on the Stroud District Carbon Neutral 2030 commitment. There will be extensive engagement during the autumn with parishes, towns, community group, businesses, and residents on this strategy.

Reopening of Ebley Mill office to the public

Arrangements are being put in place to re-open the reception at Ebley Mill in October – date to be confirmed. This will be via an appointments only system for services which it is not possible to provide in the same way remotely to residents, tenants and businesses. Changes are being put in place ahead of the opening with protective screens, signage and sanitisers to make the area Covid secure.

Covid-19 Response & Recovery

- By Friday 28 August, across all schemes a total of £26.875m has been paid out in **Business Grants**, against a total of 2,414 accounts. The **Community Resilience Fund** has given grants totalling £49,664 to 55 community groups. All Business grant schemes have now closed.
- The **GCC Community Help Hub** records requests for support from the community. At the end of August only a couple of requests were being received each week for response by the district.

A second meeting of the **Strategic Recovery Board** comprising councillors and officers was held on 12 August. Updates were provided on the four themes:

- **Economy, Market Towns & Rural Vitality**
Current projects include managing the Reopening High Street Fund, working with town and parish councils and other partners to distribute the funding allocation for marketing (the #ShopLocal campaign) and physical projects, working with GCC and parishes/towns on the Emergency Active Travel Fund to deliver identified priority projects, and distributing funding to local businesses through the Discretionary Business Support Grant Scheme. Future work will engage with town and parish councils on issues, needs and challenges and seek views on interventions/investments in town centres/edge of town centres.
- **Community Resilience & Wellbeing**
Initial actions relate to going to tender for the Leisure Review in September, scoping art, culture and heritage opportunities and links with County-wide action on cultural commissioning, Learning from the VCS Alliance survey on experience of CV-19 volunteers and reviewing learning from the 'Community Hubs Blue Print' research, and scope and timetable the community grant scheme review.
- **Environment & Climate**
This work is focused on how land use builds resilience and enhances nature conservation to build a natural environment that can both cope with changing climate and support community resilience to future disasters by supporting health and wellbeing and providing protection from flooding, extreme heat and food shortages. It relates to the new climate change strategy (see above).
- **Housing & Homelessness**
Initial actions are focused on sustaining the Covid-19 accommodation provision for homeless individuals, commissioning long-term accommodation and support for rough sleepers housed under 'everyone in' initiative; increase the number of council houses available to 'Housing First' for the homeless from 2 to 4, restart home visits for Disabled Facilities Grant referrals, and providing updated Covid 19 advice on website for landlords and private sector tenants.

Local issues

Rope Walk toilets reopen

The ladies and gents toilets at Rope Walk in Wotton reopened on 3 September. Internal locks have been fitted on the inside of the main doors and signage has been placed on the external door and inside the building, directing users to lock the main door behind them.

Potters Pond / School Road signage

Cllr Braun alerted the Highways Manager and Cllr Cordwell to a concern about the junction between Potters Pond and School Road in Wotton, where there have been numerous recent instances of motorists turning left on the approach to School Road from Potters Pond in contravention of the traffic order, which does not permit a left turn on this sharp bend. The Highways team have now programmed work to refresh the way ahead road marking and put in place a 'no left turn' repeater sign. The information sign indicating a left turn to Wortley, which is visible to motorists on the approach to the junction will be painted out.