

Stroud District Councillors' Report – January 2022

Report of meetings during December

All Stroud District Council and Committee papers can be found here:

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/meetings>

Recordings of meetings are available via the Committee meeting webpage on the Council's You Tube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeH_AmF0s-TShcYIM8Stweg/videos

Community Services & Licensing Committee – 2 December

- **Community Wellbeing Grants For 2022/23** – it was agreed to continue with the large grant scheme and to move it to a three year grant instead of a one year grant (as happened last year). This provides more sustainability to the voluntary sector. Applications will be invited later in January to start in the next financial year.

A smaller grant scheme for grants of less than £1,000 will be set up. This will be similar to the small grant scheme that operated throughout the pandemic. It's aimed at smaller groups – with a much shorter application form. These short grant applications will be reviewed every quarter.

- **New arrangements for managing Leisure Centres** – the Committee discussed a detailed Management Options Appraisal. It was agreed to support the recommendation by the Leisure Review Management Option Task and Finish Group that a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) with 'Teckal' exemptions is adopted as the preferred option for Stroud District Council to manage its two Leisure Centres in Stratford Park Stroud and The Pulse, Dursley from 1st November 2024 (instead of an in-house service, which was the other option considered).

Based on 2019/2020 costs, setting up a LATC is estimated save SDC 200k per year, prior to any investment, whereas the in-house option would cost an additional £107k. The saving could be used to invest in the facilities in line with the Leisure and Wellbeing strategy. In a mature year, after investment the LATC could create a surplus of £350K as opposed to £260K from the in-house operation. A LATC would require a board of directors to be set up, and the risk of reward and failure under the LATC structure will still sit with the council.

At this stage the Museum in the Park and SDC Health and Wellbeing services will not be included – but may be reconsidered once the LATC has matured. Further work will now be undertaken to explore the options for setting up a new Local Authority Trading Company.

- **Financial reports:** This covered the quarterly budget (forecast outturn position against the revenue and capital programme) and revised revenue estimates for 2021/22 and for 2022/23
- **Performance Indicators** for the new Council Plan (2021-26) relevant to the committee were agreed.
- **Additional reports** were presented on the Gloucestershire Health Overview Scrutiny Committee, the Museum in the Park, the Police and Crime Panel, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Mental Health Champions, Performance Monitoring and Woodchester Park Mansion.

Full details can be found along with Committee reports on the website and in the recording [here](#).

Housing Committee – 7 December

- **Financial Reports** – budget estimates were reviewed for the current and next financial years, and for the medium term financial plan, as well as the quarterly budget monitoring report for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. Members questions included the impact of inflation and on the issue of new council homes at the former Ship Inn site in Stonehouse.
- **Performance Indicators for the new Council Plan** (2021-26) relevant to the committee were agreed.
- **Cleaner Estates & Service Standards** - verbal update on action plans, with questions on waste collection at flats and installation of CCTV to manage anti-social behaviour at Chapel Street, Cam.
- **Member Reports** were received from Task & Finish Groups on Tenant Representatives, Retrofit/Carbon Reduction, Tenant Engagement and Empowerment, Housing Repairs and Voids. Progress is being made on getting empty SDC properties re-let more quickly.

The Committee papers and meeting recording can be found [here](#).

Environment Committee – 9 December

- **Public questions** – covered SDC's responsibilities on litter, and how the council will support sustainable farming within its economic strategy.
- **Ubico** - Beth Boughton, Managing Director of Ubico, presented the updated five-year company strategy, and the Committee received a financial report for the quarter and the revised budget for FY22/23 (£6.685m).
- **Performance Indicators** for the new Council Plan (2021-26) relevant to the committee were agreed.
- **Allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy**– the Committee recommended to Strategy & Resources Committee the following allocations for 2022/23:
 - o Nailsworth flood prevention and drainage scheme (£52,500)
 - o Archway School 3G Astro Turf pitch (£150,000)
 - o Stratford Park Outdoor Pool heat exchange (£20,000)
 - o Cainscross Cycle Scheme Feasibility Study (project variation of 21/22 - £75k commitment).
- **Strategic Planning** – it was agreed to establish a new Strategic Planning Advisory Board, an officer and member working group considering matters of strategic planning policy and implementation.

It was also agreed that an informal meeting would take place in January to agree a timeline on the Severn Estuary Mitigation Strategy, and that any additional air quality monitoring proposal from Cllr Kay could be costed for further review.

The Committee papers and meeting recording can be found [here](#).

The **Council meeting scheduled for 16 December** was cancelled, due to Covid and the difficulty with social distancing for members in the Council Chamber. There were no urgent items for discussion / approval that could not be postponed until the next Council meeting in February.

Consultation – Economic Development Strategy

The Council has prepared a Draft Economic Development Strategy, which covers the next 10 years and is open for consultation until 10 February 2022.

Views are welcome on all parts of the strategy including:

- Does the vision meet the overarching needs of the District?
- Do you agree with the key economic objectives and commitments outlined?
- Do you feel we have the correct priority sectors outlined in the District?
- What are the top three priority sectors for your area?

The strategy can be seen here <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-the-council/have-your-say/consultations/the-economic-development-strategy>

Please send comments to Amy.Beckett@stroud.gov.uk and with reference to the relevant section of the document.

Coronavirus grants to local businesses

SDC has so far paid out over £45 million in business grants during the pandemic. A further scheme for hospitality businesses who have been adversely affected by Coronavirus (Additional Restriction Grant 5) opened on 4 January 2022. The Council has identified businesses which meet the eligibility criteria and they are being invited to apply for a grant.

Central Government has announced further funding for businesses. Details on all grants will be available on the SDC website: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/business/business-rates>

Funding for energy saving improvements for inefficient homes

Over £5m has been secured to help improve homes with low energy efficiency ratings (EPC rating D, E, F or G) which aims to benefit households most at risk of fuel poverty in Gloucestershire & South Gloucestershire.

Most of the funding will go towards improving 200 properties which are off the gas grid in rural areas - but there is also funding available to help 100 homes on the gas network. From January, eligible households will be invited to apply to take part. To register interest in the scheme or for funding towards efficiency improvements call the Warm and Well advice line tel: 0800 500 3076.

SDC Annual Survey

Every year SDC commissions a budget survey to measure performance and set priorities. Telephone surveys were conducted with a random and representative sample of 500 residents and 200 businesses. Results showed that levels of satisfaction with SDC remain high, and much higher than a national survey of residents carried out by the Local Government Association at a similar time.

The survey found that 75% of residents are satisfied with how SDC runs things, compared to a national average of 56%. For residents the top three priorities for SDC were:

- promoting economic recovery and working with local partners to support thriving market towns and rural vitality (93%)
- working with partners and communities to tackle the climate emergency and work towards becoming a carbon neutral district (87%)
- increasing the supply of affordable housing and help prevent homelessness (85%).

There was a similar picture for businesses with 70% satisfied with how SDC runs things (63% last year). 49% of businesses had applied for a Covid-business grant from SDC, with 85% agreeing that the

application process was clear and easy to follow. The full results of the survey can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3q5IDRz>

Brimscombe Port redevelopment - asbestos removal

SDC paused demolition work at the Brimscombe Port redevelopment site following an incident on 14 December where the approved method of asbestos removal was not followed. Public safety remains the council's top priority during the redevelopment. Background air monitoring was carried out and investigations undertaken. On 5 January the Health and Safety Executive concluded that unplanned action by an excavator operative did not result in a significant release of asbestos fibres to the local area and there was little or no risk to people outside the site boundary. SDC's independent asbestos specialist has made recommendations which the contractor is acting on. Demolition works excluding asbestos removal have now recommenced in line with recommendations from the investigations.

Animal Welfare actions

In December, SDC Animal Welfare Officers reported on the rescue of a neglected and starving Anatolian Shepherd Dog at Harescombe. The dog, named Thor by a vet nurse, weighed only half of what a dog of his size should when he was found. Teckels Animal Sanctuary cared for him on behalf of SDC before he was moved to a foster home. Officers are seeking further information about this case. The Animal Welfare Service can be contacted on 01453 754490 or by emailing environmental.health@stroud.gov.uk