



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

3

18 June 2020

7.00 pm – 9.16 pm

Remote Meeting

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Doina Cornell (Chair)	P	Councillor Steve Robinson	P
Councillor Martin Whiteside (Vice-Chair)	P	Councillor Mattie Ross	P
Councillor Nigel Cooper	P	Councillor Tom Skinner	P
Councillor Stephen Davies	P	Councillor Chas Townley	P
Councillor Nick Hurst	P	Councillor Ken Tucker	P
Councillor Keith Pearson	P	Councillor Debbie Young	A
Councillor Simon Pickering	P		

P = Present A = Absent

Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive	Strategic Director of Transformation & Change
Interim Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer	Strategic Director of Communities
Strategic Director of Resources	Revenue and Benefits Manager
Strategic Director of Place	Corporate Policy and Governance Manager
	Democratic Services and Elections Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillors Hall, Lydon and Studdert-Kennedy.

SRC.008

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Young.

SRC.009

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

SRC.010

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2020 are approved as a correct record.

The Chair confirmed that there had been quite a few questions from members of the public on the black lives matter movement.

Miriam Lewis had been invited by the Leader to inform members of her own and her family's experiences of racism as a resident within the district. She also suggested we could work towards a better, more inclusive tomorrow through education, representation and resources to address inclusion.

On 8 June 2020 a statement had been signed by the Council's Group Leaders condemning racism and reaffirming the Council's commitment to promote equality and tackle discrimination.

The Leader read out a statement outlining her own personal experiences of racism and condemning all forms of racism against BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) people within our district. She stated that we need to do all we can as a Council to ensure we are an inclusive and anti-racist organisation with zero tolerance for racism and discrimination.

SRC.011 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Questions had been submitted by several members of the public and they were answered by the Leader, Councillor Cornell and the Council's Chief Executive. (Refer to the Council's [recording](#) of the meeting).

SRC.012 **COUNCIL TAX HARDSHIP SCHEME – COVID-19**

The Revenue and Benefits Manager introduced the above report for immediate implementation. A review would be undertaken later in this civic year and a report submitted to Committee.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- Consideration would be given to Discretionary Housing Benefit where applicable at application.
- The application form for hardship schemes could be adapted for both schemes once things settled down.
- The Government Grant for the Council Tax Hardship Scheme was limited to this scheme only. A monitoring mechanism was in place to ensure there would be no overspend.
- The scheme would run for the rest of this financial year, 2020/21.

Councillor Pickering proposed the report, which was seconded by Councillor Townley.

Councillor Pickering welcomed this report and was pleased the scheme had been introduced and hoped all Members would support it.

The Leader echoed Councillor Pickering's words, stating that the Council could now provide additional financial help as soon as possible to the new applicants. This would also enable the Council to identify its most vulnerable residents.

Councillor Townley was pleased that the Council were able to give this extent of support and also that we were looking into integrating the application form for claiming both of the discretionary grants.

The Leader thanked the Revenue and Benefits Manager, together with his staff for all of their hard work with discretionary business grants and the hardship scheme. It was important that help was given to those who needed it.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a. To approve the changes to the Section 13a Hardship Policy to allow for immediate implementation of the Government Covid-19 funding.**
 - b. That a report is take to the next available meeting of Council to formally adopt the amended Section 13a Hardship Policy.**

SRC.013**COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGY**

The Strategic Director of Place outlined the above report, highlighting the four work streams and the key points in Section 2. The Council would be working in close collaboration with Parish and Town Councils, together with other partner organisations regionally, nationally and the business community going forward. We would need to remain flexible. He advised that there was still a lot we do not know about what the impact on the community will be when the furlough scheme ends.

This was the beginning of a journey and there would be regular updates and opportunities for Members and Committees to steer this work.

In response to questions it was stated that the action plan was not specific but environmental and equality implications would be reviewed as the action plans were developed.

Councillor Townley proposed the report, which was seconded by Councillor Pickering.

Councillor Townley stated that this was a great opportunity to shape our recovery going forward, particularly for housing. A workshop had been scheduled with Town and Parish Councils to help recovery of the high streets and also to address issues across the district. We have to be prepared to deal with risks that are likely to happen. The approach was really good with a lot of Member involvement across all parties to develop this report.

Councillor Davies confirmed that a lot of work and discussions had already taken place and we would need a huge amount of partnership working and tap into any grants that may be available. We are spending public money and needed to spend it efficiently.

Councillor Hurst stated that the money was from Central Government and it was likely that this may affect our Rates Support Grant in years to come.

Councillor Whiteside stated that we needed to take action for a recovery that benefitted the groups most affected by the crisis and also was environmentally beneficial. In time residents would be encouraged to do more walking, cycling and use public transport; reducing air pollution and the carbon footprint. We will be working with Town and Parish Councils, GFirst LEP, businesses and other partners.

Councillor Pickering stated that it was important that we build in resilience and make sure the economy and social systems would be able to deal with future needs. It was important that we deal with how we adapt locally to build a new normal and build a future.

Councillor Ross thanked the Strategic Director of Place and all participants for their tremendous amount of work. Councillor Ross also acknowledged the valuable community work that had been going on and stated people knew their own patches and had worked in partnership. We had begun to look at our leisure and culture and must also now look at the health and wellbeing of people coming out of this pandemic.

The Leader had worked closely with the Strategic Director of Place and this was a very diverse Committee whose Members had all made valuable points. Confirming that she would be leading on the economy, the next report would be on the financial position of the Council. Working with external partners would be crucial e.g. GFirst LEP and receiving funds from Central Government. The Council would be leading on this work. The District Councils Network meet weekly and share a lot of work in common and identified statutory obligations e.g. housing, licensing and planning; using these in a good way can help the economy. Stepping up on our housing programme would help the local economy. Community wealth building is needed to develop this work and make sure we do everything we can and keep the monies within our communities. We can learn from others.

Councillor Townley summed up, the recent flooding in Nailsworth was not an isolated case, physical infrastructure cannot deal with large amounts of water on the road. He hoped all members would support the report tonight.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a. To endorse the approach as outlined in the Draft Recovery and Renewal Strategy document, attached as Appendix 1.
 - b. To endorse the draft governance arrangements attached as Appendix 2.

SRC.14 **FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Strategic Director of Resources outlined the report and confirmed that the pandemic was having a significant impact on the Council's financial resources. We are required under the rules to report once a month to Central Government the impact of the pandemic; the report was based on figures from 15 May 2020. The next report to Central Government was finalised this afternoon and the overall picture was nearly identical.

Lock down began in late March 2020 and therefore had a minimal impact on the 2019/20 budgets. The outturn report mentioned in paragraph 2.1 of the report will be available mid-late July 2020. The worst case financial assumptions had been listed within the report and were not assumptions on Council Policy. We are keen to work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils to help with reopen high streets and this will include car park charges.

On the HRA the major concern is about housing rents and the CPI assumption on the 30 year plan and inflation. The capital programme has no major changes because it is too early to say at the moment. Section 6 of the report details the mitigation on Medium Term Financial Plan and the Council is in a strong reserve position. The sum of £3.8m is in an equalisation reserve which gives us time to make efficiencies and receive funding. This can be used to meet the gap. We have already received funding from Government of £1.2m towards the cost of the crisis. In July a briefing on the financial position of the HRA will be taking place for all Members.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- It is assumed that most of the income expected would be lost, e.g. from the Pulse and the Museum.
- Some planning applications would have been delayed, we will have to look at this later in the year.

- The estimated £200k extra costs for repairs and maintenance is because during the lockdown only urgent repairs were carried out. It was estimated that there would be additional staff required to catch up from the backlog and the additional cost of PPE.
- Rent arrears are higher than last year, evidence showed that it is harder for people to pay. This is an estimated figure.
- Historical data from the 2008 recession could be useful to compare with the impact of Covid-19. The Director would look to see if there is any data available.
- One of the biggest decisions is around the car parking charges which have currently been suspended as part of the economic recovery. The income would be welcome but the shops are only beginning to re-open and car parking charges would come after that.
- There is a real need for support from Government to local authorities in the longer term. There may be a Government announcement in late June/July. Members will be updated and where decisions have to be made reports will be brought back to Committee.

The report was proposed by Councillor Townley and seconded by Councillor Cornell.

During debate Councillor Pickering said this was a helpful report but we were in moving times and it was difficult to make predictions. Government needs to set out how local authorities are to deal with the recovery in the long term. We should use the Equalisation Reserves for the predicted losses but we need to use them carefully and make best use of them.

Councillor Townley congratulated Officers for their report. The Leader confirmed that there were a lot of uncertainties and we should take all of this information on board.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a. The estimated impact of Covid-19 on the financial position of the Council be noted.**
 - b. It agrees with the Section 151 Officers opinion that the Council's Equalisation Reserve should be used to meet the cost of the pandemic.**

SRC.015

WORK PROGRAMME

A work programme planning meeting had been arranged for 23 June 2020 at 10.00 am when future items would be discussed. At the next Committee meeting a report on Water Source Heat Pumps at Ebley Mill and Brimscombe Port would be on the agenda and invitations had been sent out for a Members' briefing session on 24 June 2020 at 6pm.

The following items were suggested for inclusion on the work programme:-

- Brimscombe Port
- Financial Impact of Covid-19 on Stroud District Council – this would be a regular item
- Local Plan – this may be Environment Committee
- Funding of the Council's Play Areas

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

SRC.016

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were none because Councillor Lydon withdrew his question.

The meeting closed at 9.16 pm.

Chair