

Stroud District Council Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2019/20 Improvement Plan – Progress Report

AGS Review Reference	Governance matters identified / actions taken	Target Date and Lead Officer
Chief Financial Officer Assurance Statement	<p>Future Financial Sustainability / Covid-19 Impact</p> <p>The 2019/20 Medium Term Financial Plan identified core deficit of £1.8m by 2023/24.</p> <p>In addition, lost income and additional cost pressures as a result of the economic impact of the coronavirus lockdown is being dynamically managed and monitored and will be a key element of the next Medium Term Plan.</p> <p>Actions taken in response to the above:</p> <p>Medium Term Financial Plan has been strengthened by a thorough review of the reserves and the removal of savings targets related to the work force plan which had not been fully costed. A thorough review of the fees and charges regime had brought in an additional £100k per annum of income, albeit this is likely to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Reaching financial self-sufficiency remains a key focus of the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan and the Council is actively pursuing new income generation opportunities including improved treasury management returns which have been boosted by an additional £9m investment in multi-asset funds.</p> <p>As the long term coronavirus implications for the Council become more apparent our financial planning will be updated accordingly and an initial report has already been submitted to Strategy and Resources Committee.</p>	Chief Financial Officer (S151) 31 st March 2021

Position as at December 2020:

Strategy and Resources Committee and Council approved the latest Budget Strategy in October 2020 which shows an improved position, with a core deficit of £1.3m in 2024/25. The full and ongoing impact of Covid-19 is not yet known but will continue to be monitored and reported to members.

The full Medium Term Financial Plan, including an update on the impact of Covid-19, will be presented to Council in February 2021.

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Corporate Governance	<p>Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC)</p> <p>The LGA offers all local authorities the opportunity to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 years or so as part of its sector-led improvement programme. The Council's Corporate Peer Challenge took place between 26th and 29th March 2019. It was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities together with LGA advisors.</p> <p>The Peer Challenge team reviewed the Council's self-assessment and key documents. They conducted site visits, interviews and workshops with a wide selection of staff, members, stakeholders and partners, meeting with 107 people and holding 47 meetings during their stay. The Council received the Peer Challenge team's feedback report in May 2019 and reported it to Council on 16th May 2019. The report set out eight recommendations in respect of areas for development and improvement.</p> <p>These recommendations are listed below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Commence senior officer restructure to ensure sufficient strategic capacity is in place at the top of the organisation.	Chief Executive Ongoing

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Agree short-term priorities and actions for the period to May 2020. 3. Ensure the integrity of the current IT system. Review the progress and suitability of current plans, capability and capacity in respect of this, and beyond that to confirm the emerging plans in respect of ICT development and digital delivery fit with longer term transformational plans. 4. Work with all key stakeholders over the next year to develop a clear vision and priorities for the council aligned to our Medium Term Financial Plan, to be agreed in the next iteration of the Corporate Delivery Plan and once approved ensure this is communicated effectively to residents, businesses and other partners. 5. Create time, once the senior officer team is appointed, for the political and managerial leadership teams, both informally and formally, to have 'strategic conversations'. This will help develop a strong leadership team and help them develop clear priorities and plans to be put in place focused on SDC's improvement, for the district, wider county and sub region. 6. Establish effective workforce planning and performance management arrangements so that the Council has a committed and engaged staff group with clarity in terms of the expectations of them and sufficient capacity to deliver its plans. 7. Building on its relatively strong financial position, review how its investment and commercial plans could be enhanced. A key focus of this will be to help deliver the Council's priorities as well as sustain its financial viability into the medium term. 8. Consider reviewing governance arrangements to ensure better decision making in order to deliver its revised priorities and plans. <p>Actions taken in response to the above:</p>	
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	<p>An Action Plan was developed in respect of the 8 recommendations, including timescales and organisational leads. This has been kept constantly updated throughout the year and reported to each meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee.</p> <p>An update report is being produced in June 2020 and any outstanding actions will be carried into the 2020/21 year reflecting the fact that many of the peer challenge recommendations relate to the Medium Term.</p> <p>The LGA will be invited back for a review visit approximately two years after the original report.</p>	
<p>Position as at December 2020</p> <p>The Senior Leadership Team has committed to regular update reports on progress on peer challenge actions. The most recent report was submitted to Strategy and Resources Committee on 10 December 2020.</p>		

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Corporate Governance	<p>Covid-19 – Impact on Governance</p> <p>The Council has had the majority of its staff working from home since the week commencing March 16th 2020. This was before the Central Government lockdown. This brought about some immediate and fundamental changes to governance procedures.</p> <p>There were a number of key changes that impacted upon the governance of the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Council elections due to be held on 7th May 2020 were postponed until May 2021, councillor terms of office were extended and by-elections suspended for the period. 	Chief Executive Ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Council and committee meetings were suspended until further notice. ➤ Officers were instructed to begin working from home if at all possible. <p>The Council has responded by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Strategic Leadership Team along with the Head of Community Services, HR Manager and Communications Manager have been meeting daily thorough out this time, reducing to four days per week in late May as the immediate need to respond to the crisis subsided. ➤ The Strategic Leadership Team has met with the wider Leadership and Management Team weekly, reducing to fortnightly in June 2020. ➤ Three critical cells were established to co-ordinate the response. These were community response, customer services and communications. Each of those had a lead from SLT and were included in the daily SLT meeting agenda. ➤ Notes are held of every meeting and key decisions are recorded. An action log is maintained on a daily basis. ➤ Procurement procedures were maintained but adjusted in line with national guidelines where appropriate. ➤ Zoom and Microsoft Teams have been rolled out to allow staff and members to communicate effectively. ➤ The Chief Executive has met with all four Group Leaders at least once a week, and more often in the earlier stages, to discuss key issues. Agendas and notes have been prepared for these meetings. This group has also regularly met with the District's two MPs. ➤ The Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Resources have been publishing regular updates to all elected members throughout the process; at first this was daily and by 	
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	<p>agreement with the Group Leaders, this reduced to three times each week and then twice a week and by exception.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ An informal all Councillor meeting was held in early May to brief them on Covid response progress. In addition, weekly Covid-19 statistics demonstrating activity and progress are shared with all Councillors and MPs each Wednesday after discussion with SLT and then the four Group Leaders. ➤ Full Council in May was carried out remotely on May 19th 2020 and agreed a series of changes to the constitution and standing orders to allow Council committees to operate remotely. ➤ For decisions that would require political approval have involved consultation with all four Group Leaders to agree an urgent officer decision. Each of these decisions has been accompanied by both a report and a decision notice which have been published on the Stroud District Council website. ➤ The majority of the Council services have continued with staff working from home. ➤ Officers and members have been working in partnership with others on a local, regional and national level to strengthen response. ➤ A Recovery Strategy has been produced in consultation between Senior Officers and members of the Strategy and Resources Committee. This is to be discussed by the Strategy and Resources Committee on June 18th 2020. 	
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Position as at December 2020

The Council has responded by:

- The Strategic Leadership Team along with the Head of Community Services, HR Manager and Communications Manager

(SLT+) has now reverted to weekly meetings with ad hoc meetings arranged as necessary. (This has been stepped up since the latest lockdown was announced).

- The wider Leadership and Management Team now meets twice monthly, one focussed meeting and one information cascade.
- The three critical cells were established to co-ordinate the response, namely; community response, customer services and communications. These are still reporting to SLT+.
- Notes are held of every meeting and key decisions are recorded.
- Zoom and Microsoft Teams have been rolled out to allow staff and members to communicate effectively. Likewise the Council has, since May held all meetings remotely.
- The Chief Executive continues to meet with Group Leaders at least once a week to discuss key issues. Agendas and notes have been prepared for these meetings. This group has also regularly met with the District's two MPs.
- The Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Resources have been publishing regular updates to all elected members throughout; this is twice a week and by exception.
- Weekly Covid-19 statistics demonstrating activity and progress are shared with all Councillors and MPs each Wednesday after discussion with SLT+.
- The majority of the Council services have continued with staff working from home.
- Officers and members have been working in partnership with others on a local, regional and national level to strengthen response.
- A Recovery Strategy was produced and agreed by the Strategy and Resources Committee.