

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

14 November 2013

7.00 pm – 9.17 pm

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Stroud

3

Minutes

Membership:

Councillor Geoff Wheeler (Chair)	P	Councillor Paul Hemming	P
Councillor Doina Cornell (Vice-Chair)	P	Councillor Keith Pearson	P
Councillor Dorcas Binns	P	Councillor Simon Pickering	P
Councillor Paul Carter	P	Councillor Mattie Ross	P
Councillor Molly Cato	P	Councillor Tom Williams	P
Councillor Nigel Cooper	P	Councillor Rhiannon Wigzell	P
Councillor June Cordwell	P		

P = Present A = Absent

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor John Marjoram
 Councillor Brian Marsh
 Councillor Nigel Studdert-Kennedy

Officers Present:

Chief Executive	Joint Heads of Asset Management
Head of Finance	Head of Environmental Health
Accountancy Manager	Sport & Health Development Manager
Benefits Manager	Senior Accounting Technician
Strategic Head of Customer Services	Democratic Services and Elections Officer
Canal Project Manager	

SRC.037

APOLOGIES

None received.

SRC.038

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

SRC.039**MINUTES****RESOLVED**

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2013.

SRC.040**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

None received.

SRC.041**BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2013/14 QUARTER 2**

The Accountancy Manager presented the above report which forecast the outturn position against the Committee's revenue budgets and capital programme for 2013/14, including transactions up to 30 September 2013 and which provided projections on income and expenditure to the end of the financial year. There was a projected net under spend of £431,700 against the latest budget.

Attention was drawn to the decisions to be made concerning the transfer of the Ebley Mill Server Room capital programme from the Environment Committee to this Committee and to the creation of a new earmarked reserve to effectively resource the costs of District, County and National elections.

RESOLVED

- a) To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund Revenue budget and the Capital programme for 2013/14.
- b) To approve the transfer to reserves as set out in paragraph 7 (page 4), including the creation of the new earmarked reserve for Elections;
- c) To approve the transfer of capital budget from Environment Committee for Ebley Mill Server Room Improvements, as set out in paragraph 7 (page 4).

SRC.042**LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Benefit Manager presented the above report, the purpose of which was to set a Council Tax support Scheme for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. He referred to the Local Government Finance Act 2012 which placed a requirement on local authorities to develop a local Council Tax Support Scheme to protect pensioners, following the abolition of Council Tax benefit.

Attention was drawn to the consultation undertaken and the options for reductions set out in Appendix A, which were not being recommended to Committee, together with caseload data set out in Appendix B.

Those who had responded to consultation wanted the scheme for 2014/15 to be broadly the same as that for 2013/14, which mirrored the results of consultation undertaken in 2012 for the current year's scheme.

RECOMMENDED

That Council adopts the current Local Scheme as the scheme for Stroud District Council for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

SRC.043**WAR WIDOWS, WAR WIDOWS PENSION AND ARMED FORCES COMPENSATION SCHEME PAYMENT DISREGARDS**

The Benefit Manager presented the above report, explaining that legislation required local authorities to disregard the first £10 per week of the above payments, and allowed discretion to fully disregard these incomes when assessing entitlement to Council Tax support. This would currently affect 23 people within the District.

An amendment was proposed and seconded, that the resolution of this Committee, to disregard the above incomes, should only be reviewed if required by a change in legislation. On being put to the vote the amendment was CARRIED.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL (a) That the authority disregards in full the following incomes for the purposes of assessing entitlement to Localised Council Tax Support:

1. War Widows/Widowers Pension;
2. War Disablement Pension;
3. Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments.

(b) That this resolution should only be reviewed if required by a change in legislation.

SRC.044**USING THE BALANCE OF LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FUNDING 2013/14**

The Head of Finance presented the report which sought approval for the use of the undistributed balance of Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) funding following consultation with Parish and Town Councils.

Under the new LCTS scheme, funding was paid directly to the precepting bodies, with the District Council receiving the Parish and Town Council share of the funding. Extensive consultation had been undertaken with Parish and Town Councils, who were asked to express their preferred option for the use of the undistributed funds for 2013/14. Details of the options and responses were set out within the report.

The Head of Finance informed the Committee that the most favoured option had been to allow only those Councils who chose not to receive the funding to bid for their share to fund a project in their local community. Details of the funding that each Parish and Town Council could bid for were set out in Appendix A, however, it was suggested that bids were not limited to individual shares of the funding, to provide an opportunity for projects to be funded. There was a total of £67,000 available to those Parish and Town Councils who had chosen not to receive the funds previously.

Parish and Town Councils had been informed that funding for LCTS would reduce significantly in future years in line with cuts in Government support and there would not be a corresponding increase in the tax base to offset the loss of funding. Government funding would be reduced by approximately £1.5million in 2015/16 compared to the sum available in 2013/14.

If the Committee accepted the recommendation on use of the funds, Officers, together with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, would agree the criteria required against which to measure a successful bid.

The Committee's attention was directed to paragraphs 17, 18 and 19 of the report which proposed the arrangements for future funding to Parish and Town Councils as reflected in the decision box.

An amendment was proposed and seconded to delete point (d) of the decision, not to pay Parish and Town Councils their share of the funding in 2015/16 and in future years.

A summary of the responses to questions raised is set out below:

- The amount of funding for the LCTS Scheme from 2015/16 could not be identified and would form part of the Council's finance settlement (as an unringfenced amount) and Revenue Support Grant (RSG). LCTS funding would diminish over a period of time as the RSG continued to decrease.
- The proposer of the amendment considered that further consultation should be undertaken before making a decision to cease payment of LCTS funding to Parish and Town Councils from 2015/16.
- Other Members felt that a decision on point (d) of the decision box should not be made until the position on future funding was known.
- The Head of Finance explained that whilst a decision on LCTS funding for 2015/16 could be postponed for 12 months, addressing the matter now enabled Parish and Town Councils to plan ahead.

In debating the amendment, Members highlighted the need to maintain good relationships and trust between the District and Parish and Town Councils. It was felt that the consequences of budget cuts to the District should not be passed on to Town and Parish Councils, particularly if their funding positions might also change in the future. Alternatively, if a decision was taken for this Council not to pass on the funding from 2015/16, it was vital to communicate the implications of this decision to them.

On being put to the vote the amendment was CARRIED.

There was discussion on the funding criteria and how this would be determined. The Head of Finance explained that the criteria would be developed on the basis that projects supported local communities and would support matched funding. The detailed criteria was still to be formulated and could come back to this Committee for consideration and approval if Members so wished.

The Head of Finance explained that at no point had any promise been made to Parish and Town Councils that they would receive funds back that they did not take. Parish and Town Councils would not be limited to bidding for only their share of the fund, if more was required for projects. If successful bids exceeded the money available, then smaller amounts would be paid.

An amendment was proposed and seconded that a new point (d) be added to the decision, that Officers produce the bid criteria for approval by the Strategy and Resources Committee at its next meeting.

On being put to the vote the amendment was CARRIED unanimously.

- RESOLVED**
- (a) That those councils who chose not to receive the funds in 2013/14 be given the opportunity to bid for funds to support a project in their local community;**
 - (b) That in 2014/15, the same methodology is used to distribute the funds to the Parish and Town Councils who chose to receive the funds in 2013/14;**
 - (c) That the undistributed amount in 2014/15 is added to the 2013/14 undistributed funds increasing the total amount that parish and town councils in a) above can bid for;**
 - (d) That Officers produce the bid criteria for approval by the Strategy and Resources Committee at its next meeting.**

SRC.045

STROUD AND DISTRICT HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN 2013-2017

The Sport and Health Development Manager presented the report on the new draft Stroud District Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017, explaining the consultation undertaken and drawing attention to the services showcased within the Plan that linked to County health priorities and those within the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan.

Stroud District Council had taken a lead in being the first of the six districts to create their own Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Plan had been consulted upon and well received by the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, comprising 45 partner organisations.

Discussion took place on specific health and wellbeing issues and how these could be addressed within the Plan or by another means, including options to secure funding and the potential for future working arrangements with other medical professions/services. The Plan captured an array of examples of the work that Stroud District Council offered and was a starting point to seek better collaboration, commissioning opportunities and partnerships with public health, Clinical Commissioning Groups and other health organisations.

Members commended the Plan and its ongoing development, and asked that regard also be given to linking with previous plans and strategies in going forward.

The ensuing debate highlighted Members' particular concern for the social isolation of older men and how this could be addressed using existing resources and without any overlap.

It was felt that the Plan should identify those responsible for various aspects of health, including democratic accountability and demonstrate the connection with the County's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

In response to comments on reporting arrangements and monitoring of health issues, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to receive reports from this Council's representative on the County Health, Community and Care Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED **To endorse the draft Stroud District Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 and that the authority to sign off the final version be delegated to the Head of Environmental Health in consultation with the Leader within a four week period so as to allow any final comments to be taken into consideration.**

SRC.046 **PROPOSED MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT TO OPERATE BRIMSCOMBE PORT, THRUPP**

The Head of Asset Management presented the report which sought approval for the Council to enter into a management agreement with the Stroud Valleys Canal Company (SVCC) to operate Brimscombe Port, Thrupp. He explained that whilst the Stroud Valleys Canal Company (SVCC), owned, managed and had direct control of the site (in consultation with SDC), the Council, as project lead, was ultimately responsible for delivering the redevelopment of the site. The long term goal was to completely restore the site, whilst in the short term, the Council would look after the site's individual assets. Members were informed that the Board of the SVCC had agreed to the Heads of Terms set out in Appendix B to the report, subject to Committee approval.

Clarification was sought and received in relation to some of the points within the Management Agreement, together with the provision of a business plan by SVCC to underpin the Agreement and demonstrate income projections for the next five years.

Members agreed that Stroud District Council was best placed to oversee the future development of Brimscombe Port due to its extensive skills set. It was noted that the report presented a holding position due to the current economic climate, with no financially viable Master Plan for the site. It was suggested that this Committee establish a working group to commence work on the Master Plan.

RESOLVED **That Stroud District Council enters into a Management Agreement with SVCC to operate Brimscombe Port in accordance with the Heads of Terms shown in Appendix B and to delegate authority to the Head of Asset Management and the Canal Project Manager (in consultation with the Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee) to finalise terms for the agreement.**

SRC.047 **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Committee's performance monitoring representatives informed Members of a meeting undertaken with the Chief Executive and Leader of Council which had looked specifically at the performance of the Corporate Delivery Plan and Jobs and Growth. Both areas were on target and performing well. The next meeting in January 2014 would include an update on Risk Management.

Reference was made to the success of the recent Ambitions event held in consultation with South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, which provided an opportunity to over 1000 year 9 students from local secondary schools, to participate in a number of interactive workshops hosted by 53 companies from the local business community. Careers workshops had also been available to students and parents during the evening.

The Member wished to pay tribute to the hard work undertaken by the Council's Policy Officers, Jackie Godwin and Petula Davis, together with Allison Richards, Head of Corporate Resources, for organising the event. He felt that it had been the best event organised by this Council for young people and hoped it would continue into the future. Members were also encouraged to attend future events.

SRC.048

WORK PROGRAMME

The Leader of the Council updated on the Committee's work programme as follows:

- All budgetary items would be moved from 19 December meeting to a budget meeting on 9 January 2014.
- The following items would be added to the 19 December 2013 meeting:
 - The Ship Inn, Stonehouse
 - Annual Residents and Business Budget Strategy
 - Criteria for bids under the Local Council Tax Support Scheme
 - Establishment of Brimscombe Port Working Group
- The review of the Asset Management Strategy be scheduled for the meeting on 13 February 2014.

SRC.049

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

None received.

The meeting closed at 9.17 pm.

Chair