

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**12 September 2013****7.00 pm – 8.55 pm****Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Stroud****3****Minutes****Membership:**

Councillor Simon Pickering (Chair)	P	Councillor Haydn Jones	P
Councillor Paul Smith (Vice-Chair)	P	Councillor Graham Littleton	A
Councillor Liz Ashton	P	Councillor Stephen Moore	P
Councillor Paul Denney	P	Councillor Roger Sanders	P
Councillor Chas Fellows	P	Councillor Brian Tipper	P
Councillor Nick Hurst	P	Councillor Martin Whiteside	P

P = Present A = Absent

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Geoff Wheeler

Officers Present:
 Strategic Head (Development Services)
 Head of Planning
 Head of Cultural Services
 Canal Project Manager

 Accountancy Manager
 Senior Policy Officer
 Democratic Services and Elections Officer
EC.013 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Graham Littleton.

EC.014 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

EC.015 MINUTES**RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 June 2013 and the Special Meeting held on 8 July 2013 are confirmed and signed as a correct record.**EC.016 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

None received.

EC.017 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2013-14

The Accountancy Manager presented the Committee with its first monitoring report of the financial year, detailing a forecast of the outturn position against revenue budgets and the capital programme for 2013/14. An overall budget strategy report for the Council would be considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 24 September, detailing the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Council's position over the next four years.

Members were referred to the detailed explanation of significant variations as set out in Appendix A to the report, with Appendix B stating that there were no Capital variances forecast for 2013/14. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that the latest budget figure for 2013/14 in Table 1 of the report should read £5,021,100.

Attention was drawn to areas of risk and uncertainty associated with the outturn forecast for Development Control, in particular, appeal costs for the County Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the incinerator at Javelin Park. This was likely to cost up to £150,000 which was proposed to be transferred from reserves. The Accountancy Manager also referred the Committee to details of the underspends set out in Appendix A.

The following points were made in response to questions:

- £150,000 from reserves would be this Council's contribution to cover the costs of expertise for the incinerator appeal (the total costs being shared equitably between all six districts and GlosVain). In response to a question on obtaining best value for the appeal costs, the Strategic Head of Development Services agreed to supply the Committee with a breakdown of the costs incurred for the inquiry at a future date.
- The underspends in Development Control and Building Control had been attributable to the use of staff resources in these areas. Efforts had been made to balance budgets on a commercial basis and to provide sufficient staff resources to accommodate any upturn in the market. Bills for some consultant's fees had not yet been received and payment of these would also reduce the underspend.
- Stroud district Council was the lead authority in the County for the Clinical Sharps waste disposal programme. The £40,000 overspend had been a technical overspend, with underspends rolled forward from last year due to NHS delays in invoicing. This cost would be shared with the other Gloucestershire districts.
- Attention was drawn to the monitoring and reporting back on areas of risk and uncertainty. Whilst the Accountancy Manager was unaware of any further potential variations to the Committee's budget forecast at this time, the second quarter monitoring report in October would highlight any further issues and explain how these would be monitored and responded to by management.

RESOLVED To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund Revenue budget and the Capital Programme for 2013/14.

RECOMMENDED That the Strategy and Resources Committee approves the proposed transfer from earmarked reserves as set out in paragraph 7 (page 4).

EC.018 **DESIGNATION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AREAS**

The Head of Planning presented the report requesting the Committee to consider the nomination of three Neighbourhood Planning Areas affecting the parishes of Eastington, Stonehouse and Whiteshill and Ruscombe. He reported that no objections had been forthcoming on any of the proposals during each of their six week community consultation periods.

There were other applications for neighbourhood plans pending in the district; approximately six would progress soon and there were a number of others that would develop more steadily. The Government had made £1.5million available to support Local Planning Authorities during the nomination stage, however this would not be sufficient to cover all areas in England. The Council could apply for the initial £5,000 but the receipt of this and any future Government funding could not be guaranteed. The Head of Planning explained that whilst the Council could also apply to the Government for up to £25,000 for subsequent inquiry and referendum costs, the funding would be insufficient to meet requirements. The Committee would therefore need to consider the establishment of a budget for 2014/15 financial year and to ascertain costs for future years' budgets. It was hoped that Parish and Town Councils would absorb some of the costs, with assistance from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and the Government, with the district Council also providing some financial assistance.

In response to questions the following points were made:

- Local Planning Authorities were required to assist, not encourage Parish and Town Councils with production of Neighbourhood Plans.
- Three Neighbourhood Plans had been completed since the Localism Act 2011 came into force.
- Planning Inspectors were reluctant to progress Neighbourhood Plans until Councils had adopted their Local Plans.
- Some Neighbourhood Plans in other areas had been unsuccessful and there had been occasions when Local Authorities had refused to accept the neighbourhood boundary proposed.
- Current costs had been based on officer time, although this could not be sustained as other applications were submitted, particularly during the period leading to adoption of the Local Plan.
- Those Parishes who had submitted nominations might not proceed to the next stage of the process for some time.

RESOLVED **To accept the nomination of the three Neighbourhood Planning Areas as defined in Appendix A to the report.**

EC.019 **CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Strategic Head of Development Services presented the report detailing achievements to date and asked the Committee to consider future projects. He referred to performance in 2012/13 and provided an explanation of the graph on

page 5 depicting significant departure from the zero carbon trajectory line. He explained that savings made from investments in housing stock and the hydro power scheme at Dudbridge, had been excluded from the calculations, as these would be recouped in future years. Members were referred to areas where CO2 emissions had increased and it was noted that these would be looked at further.

The Strategic Head of Development Services explained that improvements had been made to the collection of performance data and undertaking complex calculations. There were areas where significant carbon savings were being achieved but these could be more long term and likely to generate carbon emissions at the outset of the project, for example, increased housing contractor mileage was reflective of the maintenance programme of improving the energy efficiency of Council homes.

The Committee was informed that there was currently no specific budget available for future projects and such costs would have to be considered alongside other Council priorities when setting the budget. An overview of the position on some of the projects in Appendix A was presented to Members, with reference made to those completed in years 2011/12 and 2012/13 and those scheduled for 2013/14, some of which had been funded and some of which had no financial support.

The ensuing discussion covered many aspects including the measurement and inclusion of data on carbon savings, prioritising and costing 2013/14 projects and the position on the Ebley Mill Hydro for which funding of £360,000 remained in budget. Clarification was sought and received on the technical aspects of the proposal to increase the height of the weir, in order that the hydro could generate more power. It was noted that investigations were underway to look at the best opportunities to maximise output from the hydro, prior to going out to tender.

Members welcomed an opportunity to prioritise schemes suggested for 2013/14 and to consider allocating an appropriate budget to these. It was highlighted that some would need to be examined in depth in order to ascertain value for money, community acceptance and longevity. The Chair drew attention to the Council's zero carbon aspirations from its own emissions through offsetting and the scale of potential projects based on current energy consumption levels. He reminded the Committee that the implementation of energy saving measures made it increasingly difficult to reduce emissions and felt that more radical approaches would be required.

Acknowledgement was made of the Council's budgetary position and the need to deliver savings in the coming years. On this basis Members concurred with the notion of pursuing more radical schemes to reduce emissions and save energy. Specific reference was made to the possibility of external sources providing wind turbines with the Council purchasing the energy generated. In doing so, regard should be given to any initial costs and payback periods, including the value of any Government subsidy which could not be guaranteed in the future.

Having moved and seconded the recommendations set out in the report, the following amendment, to be added as point 3 of the decision, was proposed:

"To consider the opportunities and risks for the delivery of significant renewable energy generating infrastructure".

On being seconded the amendment was put to the vote and CARRIED.

A Member suggested a further amendment to point 3 of the proposed decision to provide a timescale for reporting back on projects.

The Accountancy Manager reminded the Committee of the forthcoming budget setting process and the budget report to be submitted to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 19 December, which would depict the Council's bleak financial position in moving forward. This Committee could consider potential schemes, with costings, at its meetings on 31 October and 5 December, to be recommended to the Strategy and Resources Committee who would consider requests from all service committees.

The Strategic Head of Development Services confirmed that costings could be provided for the 2013/14 schemes set out in Appendix A for the next meeting. However, the same level of detail would not be feasible for any potential new and bespoke schemes by that time. On this basis he would attempt to ascertain an overview of what the cost implications might be.

An amendment to point 3 of the proposed decision to add the words "*at the next meeting on 31 October 2013*" was proposed and seconded on being put to the vote was CARRIED.

On the substantive Motion being moved and seconded, it was put to the vote and CARRIED. Accordingly it was

- RESOLVED**
1. **To recognise the achievements and performance to date.**
 2. **To consider the future programme, capital costs, revenue and carbon savings.**
 3. **To consider the opportunities and risks for the delivery of significant renewable energy generating infrastructure at the next meeting on 31 October 2013.**

EC.020 BUSINESS PLAN

RESOLVED To agree the Committee's work programme, subject to the addition of the following items for the next meeting on 31 October 2013:

- Carbon Management: Renewable Energy Opportunities/Costings
- Presentation on Decommissioning of Berkeley Nuclear Power Station
- Nominations for Member representation on specified meetings/forums

Discussion took place on moving forward the cross party task and finish group established to look at the redevelopment of Brimscombe Port. The general consensus of the Committee was that such a group was not required at this stage due to the considerable funding gap that existed.

EC.021 **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

None received.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Chair