

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

5 December 2017

7.00 pm – 10.14 pm
 Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Stroud

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Minutes

Membership:

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

P = Present A = Absent

Officers Present:

Chief Executive	Elections Manager
Director of Customer Services	Head of Property Services
Director of Tenant & Corporate Services	Property Manager
Head of Legal Services	Principal Accountant
Solicitor	Democratic Service Officers
Business Projects Manager	

Members also Present:

Councillors Martin Baxendale, Chris Brine, George Butcher, Jim Dewey, John Jones, Norman Kay, Darren Loftus, John Marjoram, Karen McKeown, Skeena Rathor, Nigel Studdert-Kennedy, Haydn Sutton and Tom Williams.

SRC.040

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Lydon and Nick Hurst.

SRC.041

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Simon Pickering declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda item 6, as he is employed by one of the bidders to purchase the Subscription Rooms. Councillor John Marjoram declared an interest under the Code of Conduct as a Stroud Town Councillor, in the same item.

SRC.042 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED **To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2017.**

SRC.043 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Questions were submitted by the following people:

Peter Cluer	Julie Wickham	Emily Cluer
Richard House	Seb Bacon	Jacqui Stearn
Rosalinde Scott-Hodgetts	David Lambert	Mark Nurse
Jackie Garner	Brian Oosthuysen	Sym Roe
Anna Powell-Smith	Robin Phillips	Eva Ward
Alix Boon	Sarah Phaedre Watson	Paul Halas
Sheila Munnoch	Kate Kay	

Submitted questions and answers can be found on the [Committee page](#).
Supplementary questions and answers can be viewed on the [Council's webcast](#).

SRC.044 **PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW REVISED PROPOSALS**

The Chief Executive explained that the revised proposals to changes in parliamentary boundaries, as set out in the report, had been published in October and the 8 week consultation period ends on 11 December 2017. Individual Councillors or political groups could respond to the changes. The Committee noted the report and the need for consultation responses to be provided to the Boundary Commission by the stated deadline.

SRC.045 **SUBSCRIPTION ROOMS, STROUD**

Councillor Simon Pickering left the Council Chamber prior to the consideration of this item and took no further part in the meeting.

The Chair confirmed that Committee had received updated financial figures. The Director of Customer Services confirmed that the website had been updated following various meetings. From communications she had received the strong view from members of the public was that the Subscription Rooms should remain within public ownership on a leasehold basis. The Chair also recorded the receipt of a second petition on the matter.

Members of the Task and Finish Group and the Council, who did not sit on this Committee, were all given the opportunity to provide their comments on the matter. Councillors Baxendale, Studdert-Kennedy, Kay and Rathor subsequently set out their views to the Committee.

Motion to suspend standing order 8.1 in accordance with constitution section 3 paragraph 8.2(q)

In response to a Member question, officer advice was provided on why the motion was published on the agenda.

In the absence of the Leader, Councillor Steve Lydon, Councillor Martin Whiteside proposed and Councillor Steve Robinson seconded the motion.

Upon the vote, 5 members voted for the motion and 5 against. The Chair used her casting vote in favour of the motion.

To consider the notice of Motion

Councillor Whiteside introduced the motion as printed on the agenda.

Members debated the contents of the motion and thanked the Task and Finish Group (Subscription Rooms) for its work on the matter over the last 12 months. A detailed discussion ensued on the merits of a sub-committee as opposed to a Task and Finish Group and the need for the committee to ensure its resolution was in line with the legal duty to secure best consideration or otherwise establish a valid exemption from that requirement.

At 9.00 pm the meeting adjourned and reconvened at 9.37 pm.

Taking account of advice provided to the Committee and concerns expressed regarding the proposal to sell the freehold of the building, Councillor Nigel Cooper moved an amendment to the motion (in particular paragraphs 1 to 4) to reflect the current bids not being fully acceptable; to renegotiate terms including a lease with interested parties; and to secure independent assessment of the bids received by, for example an reputable accountancy firm. The amendment was seconded by Councillor Stephen Davies.

The amendments were discussed and upon the vote 5 members voted for the motion and 5 against. The Chair used her casting vote against the amendment. The motion was LOST.

Further to public concerns about the sale of the asset, Councillor Whiteside proposed amendments to his original motion (affecting paragraphs 2 to 4), including establishing a new Task and Finish Group rather than a sub-committee to consider future bids for a circa 30 lease of the Subscription Rooms and to clarify the purposes for changing the committee's approach to the future of the Subscription Rooms which were seconded by Councillor Steve Robinson:

- Paragraph 2(iii) be amended to read, "promote and enhance" the availability of the venue to the public for public arts, community use and education.
- Paragraph 3 provide for the information listed to be "ideally" provided rather than required.
- Paragraph 4 be amended to ensure that the proposal for a sub-committee be replaced with a new Task and Finish Group and in respect to the latter part of that paragraph the group instead required to use all reasonable endeavours to promote public participation.

Upon the vote 5 members voted for the motion and 5 against. The Chair used her casting vote in favour of the motion and the amendments were CARRIED.

Officer advice was provided in response to further questions raised about the amendments, which were subsequently debated.

In debate, concerns were expressed about the amended substantive motion before the Committee did not ensure that an independent outside body was involved with the evaluation process. The Chief Executive Officer gave an assurance to use an external body to audit the process. There had been one financial error, which had been corrected, and was the subject of an audit investigation.

At 10.00 pm, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Committee voted unanimously to continue with the meeting.

Debate ensued on the amended substantive motion, including the failure to consider the Task and Finish Group's report which reflected the brief it was given. In response to questions raised, about the need to start the review process again and bookings for the Subscription Rooms pending the resolution of the matter, the Committee was advised that decisions would be made by management as to the appropriateness of accepting new bookings depending upon progress made over the coming months; and a relevant disposal such as a circa 30 year lease would need to be completed by the end of August 2018, to avoid the need to re-advertise.

In summing up the seconder confirmed members had listened to what the people of Stroud and the district had wanted. There was time for a good bid to come forward. The proposer reminded members of the importance of the Subscription Rooms and its forecourt which should continue to be in public ownership. He considered work would continue with groups and private businesses to deliver services.

Upon the vote 5 members voted for the motion and 5 against. The Chair used her casting vote in favour of the amended motion and the said motion was CARRIED:

1. That the Committee does not accept any of the bids considered by the Group. The Group has now finished its task and we thank the members and supporting officers for their work.
2. To enable the Subscription Rooms:
 - (i) freehold to be retained in public ownership;
 - (ii) ensure that the level of Council cost is significantly reduced; and
 - (iii) to promote and enhance the availability to the public as a venue for public arts, community use and education

the Council will advertise the lease on the Subscription Rooms (excluding the forecourt) for a circa 30 full repairing lease. Such lease option also to be raised with the current external bidders.
3. Bids for the lease will ideally:
 - (i) illustrate whether and if so, how, the bidder has engaged the local community in its bid;
 - (ii) set out implications for existing Council employees working at the Subscription Rooms; and
 - (iii) show how they will develop the venue for public arts; community use; and education, including a community use strategy and pricing policy.
4. Group Leaders (or their nominees), in consultation with the Head of Property Services will be constituted as a task and finish group to guide the process. This task and finish group shall:
 - (i) report to the next meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee on progress;

- (ii) to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 12 April on any offers received as a result of any advertisement (including discussions with the current external bidders) and if possible, with a recommendation for the future of the Subscription Room service; and
- (iii) ensure adequate consultation with staff, service users, the local community and existing bidders is done concerning the future of the services provision and the building (any additional consultation to be concluded by the end of February 2018).

The task and finish group will use all reasonable endeavours to encourage public participation.

5. The Council shall establish a community forum to meet with the successful bidder at least twice a year to advise on the management of the Subscription Rooms. Such a forum to be chaired by a member appointed by the Community Services and Licensing Committee and the forum will report to this committee at least once a year.
6. If it is not possible, to identify any alternative options for the future of the Subscription Rooms then the matter will be referred to a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee for further consideration.
7. The Community Services and Licensing Committee will determine the future of the Tourist Information Centre currently provided within the Subscription Rooms in the light of the decision of the Strategy and Resources Committee on the matter.

SRC.046 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were none.

The meeting closed at 10.14 pm.

Chair