



Minutes of the meeting of COUNCIL
22nd April 2024, at 7.30pm
At the Congregational Church, Bedford Street, Stroud

Present

Kevin Cranston, Tony Davey, Mick Fealty (from item 4), Susan Fenton, Rob Green (from Item 4), Camilla Hale, Adrian Oldman, Stella Parkes (Chair) Lucas Schoemaker and Louisa Stinton

Absent

Cllrs Shyam Ananthan, Laurie Davies, Mark Graham and Jeremy Green

In Attendance

Helen Bojaniwska (CEO, Town Clerk), Kate Montgomery (Deputy CEO, Town Clerk), Kate Buckingham (Communications and Engagement), Gloucestershire County Councillor David Drew

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Geoffrey Andrews and Liz Child (both personal)

2. Declarations of interest and requests for dispensations

The CEO, Deputy CEO and Communications and Engagement Officers declared a financial interest in item 17 as council employees.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the Council meeting on 4th March 2024 were **approved** by the members present and signed by the Chair.

4. Mayor's remarks

The Mayor reflected on her time as Mayor and councillor, and thanked councillors for the good spirit of debates, in spite of political differences. She commended councillors for taking the good of the town to heart, and reaching consensual decisions, and hoped that this would continue in future. Cllr Parkes recalled that when she joined the Council Covid-19 restrictions had been in place, so meetings were being held on Zoom, which made it difficult for councillors to bond.

Cllr Parkes felt that the Council had achieved some good outcomes for the town, especially through the work of the Community Development team. She thanked the CEO and Deputy CEO, all the staff and councillors for their achievements, in spite of being thrown regular curveballs. Her time as Mayor had been revelatory, and she felt

it had been a rare privilege to meet so many amazing people and organisations in Stroud.

The Mayor gave special thanks to Cllrs Hale, Cranston and R Green for their valuable support and long service. She looked forward to what comes next for the Council following the election of new councillors, planned relocation and staffing changes.

It was **agreed** to send thanks to the Council's Communications Contractor Marianne Sweet who had recently stepped down.

5. Questions from members of the public

None received

6. Reports from County and District Councillors

Gloucestershire County Councillor David Drew reported on a recent site meeting concerning improvements to facilities for bus users at Merrywalks. He confirmed that the parking review had been scrapped in the light of massive public opposition in most areas to the proposed introduction of residential parking permit schemes. He did, however, feel that parking restrictions would be sensible in some areas.

Cllr Drew reported that a county-wide flooding summit would be held in May. He observed that sandbags had recently been seen in some areas of Stroud, which suggested that further flood prevention measures might be needed.

Stroud District Councillor Schoemaker suggested that pavements might need to be built up to prevent flooding of homes. With regard to the delayed Local Plan, he reported that the issues relating to capacity of Junction 14 of the M5 had now been resolved, but discussions were ongoing about Junction 12. He felt that the redevelopment of the former Berkeley Power Station and proposals for a Severn Barrage might justify improvements at Junction 12.

Cllr Schoemaker noted that the cost-of-living crisis was still hitting residents hard and confirmed that the District Council had committed to ongoing support for the Community Hubs, which had been lifesavers for many people. He also felt that the future in-house management of the leisure centres would help address health inequalities.

Cllr Cranston asked why demand on Foodbanks is still rising. Cllrs Schoemaker and Davey suggested that poor housing, reduced stigma, and increasing rents and mortgage payments are all factors.

7. CEO's Report

The CEO's written report was noted. The CEO expressed her thanks to retiring councillors for their support.

8. Update on relocation

The CEO gave an update on relocation plans. The owners of Locking Hill had responded to the Council's solicitor's enquiries and good progress was being made.

9. Internal Audit report

The Council received an Internal Audit report prepared by Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town. It was noted that no recommendations for improvements had been made. Councillors thanks the finance staff for their excellent work.

10. Invitation from Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils to submit a motion for consideration at their AGM on 20th July 2024

It was **agreed** to ask the Association to propose a research project on the payment of allowances to councillors in order to create a national consensus.

A further suggestion relating to permission to hold remote meetings was not progressed because the CEO advised that NALC are already lobbying for this.

Action: CEO to submit motion to GAPTC

11. Approval of Service Level Agreements

It was **agreed** to approve three Service Level Agreements as recommended by the Lansdown Hall Working Group and Community Committee:

Lansdown Hall and Gallery	£5,000.00	3 years
Subscription Rooms	£15,000.00	1 year
Play Gloucestershire (Play Rangers)	£16,178.56	3 years

Action: CEO to issue SLAs

12. Funding for Real Time Passenger Information equipment at Merrywalks

Councillor Oldman reported on a recent site meeting with Cllr Drew, the CEO, Gloucestershire County Council officers and the Manager of the Five Valleys Shopping Centre. It was noted that the CEO had asked for the plans for the site to be presented to the Regeneration Working Group later in the week. It was noted that longevity of service would be a condition of the supply contract for the Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) equipment and that all bus operators are now required to install tracking equipment in their buses. Tracking information is currently only available on the Traveline system. Potential issues include gaps in 4G connectivity and the risk that drivers might override the tracking systems. It was noted that Stroud District Council have committed £98,000 CIL funding to the wider project to improve facilities at Merrywalks.

It was **agreed** to delegate to the CEO approval of a contribution of £14,000 from the Council's CIL reserve to fund installation of Real Time Passenger Information equipment at Merrywalks, in conjunction with the replacement of bus shelters by

Gloucestershire County Council, subject to consultation with the Regeneration Working Group.

Actions: Regeneration Working Group to review plans. CEO to approve funding.

13. Panel to assess Community Awards nominations

Cllrs Parkes, Hale and Cranston were **appointed** to assess nominations.

14. Community Support Fund grant application

A Community Support Fund application from Hawkwood College was considered. It was **agreed** to award a grant of £500 from the earmarked reserve fund for grants. The CEO was asked to advise the applicants that the grant might have been higher if the application had set out more clear benefits to Stroud residents.

Action: CEO to arrange payment and write to applicants

15. Committee and Working Group minutes

The reports of the following meetings, previously circulated, were **received**:

Consultations & Highways Committee	11 th March 2024
Community Committee	18 th March 2024
Environment Committee	19 th March 2024
Lansdown Hall WG	25 th March 2024
Personnel Committee	9 th April 2024

16. Exclusion of press and public

It was **resolved** in view of the confidential nature of the business to be discussed, to exclude the press and public from the remainder of the meeting.

Cllr Drew left the meeting.

The agenda was reordered as follows

18. Update on a legal matter

The CEO reported that the matter had been referred back to the County Court.

Kate Buckingham left the meeting.

19.17 Staff review

The Council considered several recommendations from the Personnel Committee arising from a recent Staff Review. The CEO presented the report and summarised the recommendations, which included new staff structures, adjustment to some pay scales and hours. It was noted that the Personnel Committee had added in the creation of Business Administration Apprenticeship, which was currently being researched. It was noted that government funding would be available for this post.

Councillors debated the Review recommendations which focused on increasing the capacity for managing the Council's project programme and communications.

Some concerns were raised about the justification for more staff. The CEO explained that due to the level of the Council's activities, project ambitions, budgets and meeting demands it now met the Local Council 4 level in the national pay scales and that staffing levels were below average for a large council.

A 2-year recruitment programme was recommended by the Personnel Committee which would help the Council move forward to a new era, alongside the relocation of the office and depot, becoming more accessible to the public and more outward facing. The CEO confirmed that changes to the 2024-25 staff budget could be met from underspends in 2023-24 and that further additions in 2025-26 would have to be included in the new budget.

Councillors welcomed the improvements already made to communications and community engagement, but felt that additional staff would help to build on this and provide welcome additional capacity for internal communications. It would also allow for more storytelling and help evidence the social impact of the Council's work. It was reported that in a commercial environment an organisation of a similar size would certainly have two communications roles. It was also felt that the CEO and Deputy CEO need more time for strategic work.

Cllr Green proposed approval of the new roles recommended for 2024-25, but deferral of the additional posts recommended for 2025-26, so that the new council could assess them. The proposal was not seconded.

The CEO confirmed that the Council currently contracts out project management for building projects and that this could potentially be brought in house when the new team is in place.

Cllr Hale felt it was important for the current councillors, who have a good understanding of the staffing needs to make a long-term commitment to introducing a new structure, rather than leaving it to new councillors, who may not have the necessary understanding of the Council's history and circumstances.

Cllr Fealty noted a comment in the LCC report about the need for councillors to understand their role. The CEO confirmed that detailed induction training would be provided after the election.

Cllr Cranston proposed the recommendations made by the Personnel Committee, which were all approved:

- revised salary scales for four posts, backdated to 1st April 2024, to realign the grades to the work being completed
- increased hours for one part time member of staff
- phased changes to the staff structure over the 2024-25 and 2025-26 periods
- consider realigning the Council's democratic structures in the near future
- carry out further reviews every 3-4 years

Actions: CEO to investigate staffing for Chapel Street café, amend salary scales and working hours, commence changes to staff structure including recruitment of new posts, add review of democratic structures and further staff reviews to the work plan.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

Chair

Date