

STROUD TOWN COUNCIL
**Minutes of the meeting of
the COMMUNITY COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
4th October 2021 at 7.30pm
Online meeting via Zoom**

Present

Cllrs Crews, Davies (Chair), Fenton, Green, Parkes and Seffar

In attendance

Helen Bojaniwska (Town Clerk), Emily Osler (Community Development Officer), Miranda Eeles (Creative Sustainability CIC)

Absent

Cllrs Graham and Oldman

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Andrews (personal).

2. Declarations of Interest or Requests for dispensations

Cllr Davies declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the grant application from Paganhill Community Group.

The Town Clerk declared a personal interest in the Stroud Song Contest grant application.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the Committee meeting on 28th June 2021 were **approved** by the members present and will be signed as a correct record by the Chair at the next possible opportunity.

4. Questions from members of the public

None received.

5. Presentation on Community Hubs

Miranda Eeles from Creative Sustainability CIC gave a presentation and answered questions from members on a research project on community hubs commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council and Stroud District Council. The output of the work would be a strategic plan to support development of a resourced and connected network of community hubs with the aim of increasing community resilience across Stroud District.

Some challenges were identified in discussion, including the need for fully resourced buildings with security of tenure, and for more community development staff. Questions were raised about volunteer capacity – will there still be enough people able to give up their time once they return to work after the pandemic? Is there scope to pay volunteers to participate in meetings with funders? It was noted that time-banking is part of the research.

A further question was raised about the potential for unequal distribution of support – it was felt that the areas most in need may lack volunteers with the skills, ability, experience and confidence to deliver support, and are also short of suitable buildings. The importance of Asset Based Community Development was noted.

6. Update from Community Development Officer

It was noted that this would be the Community Development Officer's final meeting before she leaves the Council. The Chair and Committee thanked her for her work and wished her well for the future. The Clerk reported that the Personnel Committee had agreed to increase the hours for the post to 30 per week.

The Community Development Officer (CDO) answered questions on her written report. It was noted that applications had been made to list key community buildings as Assets of Community Value.

There was some discussion about the ongoing role of the food hubs and "Freezers of Love". It was reported that food distribution issues at the supermarkets were impacting on the availability of food distributed through the FareShares scheme. The Trinity Hub group were exploring the potential to distribute local food surplus as an alternative, for example from the Farmers' Market.

It was noted that the planned Paganhill Community Group survey had been designed to: evaluate how they are performing, find out what people need and how they are coping, and check whether people know how to access support. The survey contains affirmative questions relating to neighbourliness and belonging and has been developed as a pilot project in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire, with the potential to be rolled out to other areas. It will be delivered by local residents.

It was reported that accessing and supplying food had been important stepping stones for participation in community hubs and building confidence. The Middle of the Hill group were still distributing lots of food, which suggests a high need for support.

A concern was noted that the upcoming reduction in Universal Credit, together with rising fuel prices were likely to hit some households very hard.

7. Review of Service Level Agreements

Down to Earth Gardening Support

A report from Down To Earth was received. The Committee remained concerned that the scheme was not being actively promoted and noted a lack of consistency. It was **agreed** to defer a decision on renewing the agreement.

Action: The Clerk was asked to meet with Down To Earth and Stroud District Council who also offer a scheme for their tenants, and to review the delivery mechanism and report back to the next meeting.

Citizens Advice

It was **agreed** to renew the Service Level Agreement for 3 years from 1st April 2022.

8. Service Level Agreement – Marah

Some amendments to the services provided under an existing agreement were **approved**.

9. Proposed Service Level Agreement – OpenHouse

The Committee felt that further information on the service being offered, the contractual terms and length of other funding agreements were needed before an agreement could be approved.

Action: It was **agreed** to request further information and wait for the completion of a research project being conducted by the Deputy Clerk and then reconsider the proposal.

10. Note the grants awarded from the Covid-19 fund

The grants awarded under delegated authority to the Clerk were noted.

11. Reports on grants awarded from the Covid-19 fund

The Committee received a report from The Door Youth Project on how a grant had enabled them to engage with young people online when they were unable to meet in person.

12. Funds available in Grant Funds

The funds for the 2021-22 period were noted.

13. Grant applications

The following applications were considered:

Arts and Culture Fund

Stroud Song Contest – application **declined**. The application came in too late to be considered before the event took place. The Committee recommended that the applicants reapply in plenty of time for next year and consider whether it might be possible to reduce reliance on online voting, which has accessibility issues.

Goodwill – it was noted that an application had been submitted to Gloucestershire County Council for a higher amount and more activities than detailed on application form. It was **agreed** to award a grant, but a decision on the final amount was delegated to the Clerk based on the outcome of the Gloucestershire County Council application, with a minimum commitment of £500, and a maximum of £2,000. The Committee expressed a preference for the Council's contribution being used to reduce the cost to schools based in the parish.

Community Support Fund

Christmas Tree Festival – a grant of £1,000 was **approved**. It was noted that this was a higher grant than previous years, but the Committee took into account the desire to create a bigger event than normal to support Covid-19 recovery.

Sladebank Wood CIC – the Committee had questions about whether two chainsaws are really needed and whether or not they could be shared with other community organisations so that they get more use. A question was raised about whether the applicants already have suitable PPE and whether operators have been provided with appropriate training. The applicants were requested to review their application and reapply to the Environment Committee for a Carbon Reduction Fund grant.

Cllr Davies left the meeting.

Paganhill Community Group – it was **agreed** to delegate a decision on a grant application relating to a gardening project to the Clerk.

Actions: the Clerk was asked to explore questions relating to: security of tenure and protection of biodiversity. The Council's Rangers to be asked to visit and advise on clearance work. The committee asked the Clerk to establish whether any clearance or maintenance work that is needed could be done by local community organisations, e.g. Stroud Valleys Project or Down to Earth.

The Committee also requested a report from the Clerk on the potential to offer a longer-term Service Level Agreement, rather than repeated grant applications to give the organisation a regular income.

Cllr Davies rejoined the meeting.

Small Grants

No applications received.

The meeting ended at 10pm.

Chair..... Date.....