

STROUD TOWN COUNCIL  
**Minutes of the meeting of the  
Finance and Policy Working Group  
13<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

**Present**

Councillors Kevin Cranston (from item 7), Laurie Davies, Rob Green, Camilla Hale, Stella Parkes and Lucas Schoemaker (Chair)

**Absent**

None

**In attendance**

Helen Bojaniwska (Town Clerk), Kate Montgomery (Deputy Clerk), Nadja Singh (Fundraiser) and Cllr Rachel Smith.

**1. Apologies**

None received.

**2. Declarations of interest or requests for dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or requests for dispensations.

**3. Questions from the public**

There were no questions.

**4. Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Policy Working Group of 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021 were noted and will be approved by the Committee at the next opportunity.

**5. Authorisation of payments**

The working group reviewed payments listed in **Appendix A** from October 2021.

**Action:**

The Working Group **recommended** that the payments be approved by Full Council at the next meeting.

**6. Budget Monitoring**

The budget monitoring report to end of October 2021 was received.

**7. To receive a report on fundraising for the Subscription Rooms**

The working group received a report from the Council's Fundraiser and were impressed by the amount of funding secured for both building improvements and emergency Covid-19 support funding.

Cllr Cranston joined the meeting.

## **8. Draft Communications Strategy**

The Working Group considered a draft Communications Strategy prepared by Breakthrough Communications, following research on the Council's existing communications work and workshops with officers and councillors.

The Clerk explained the rationale for further investment in Communications work and its strategic importance. Cllr Parkes was keen for there to be an in-house communications staff resource to support strategic planning, provide transparency on the council's spending and to enable the Council to set the agenda on communications rather than acting responsively. Cllr Davies also expressed support and raised a concern that the Council is not currently getting a strong enough message out to the public about the work being done.

In further discussion there was general support for improving communications, but some councillors were concerned about the cost implications. It was felt that further work would be required to establish how much the introduction of a Communications Officer would help to relieve workload pressures on other staff and what the budget implications would be. There was also a request for the communications action plan to include a guide on messaging for councillors.

### **Actions:**

It was **agreed** to ask the Personnel Committee to look at staff costs and include a provisional figure in the draft 2022-23 budget.

Councillors were requested to submit any specific comments about the draft Strategy to the Clerk, which would also be circulated to other members for comment.

## **9. Draft updated Strategy**

The Working Group reviewed an update to the Council's Strategy originally approved in 2019. The Clerk reported that some of the background data had been updated and some adjustments had been made to the presentation and wording of some of the objectives and priorities, to make them more transparent and to allow for the addition of a new section linked to the Communications Strategy.

Several minor amendments were suggested. There was some discussion about the text relating to the diversity of the council, which it was felt could be clearer. This raised questions about how to recruit younger members.

### **Action:**

It was **agreed** to recommend the updated document to Council subject to the inclusion of the amendments discussed.

## **10. Draft 5-year Action Plan**

The Clerk presented a detailed Action Plan linked to the Council's strategy, including an analysis of how each action links to the Council's priorities, the staffing and budgetary requirements and a 5-year delivery plan.

### **Action:**

It was **agreed** to recommend approval of the Action Plan to Council.

There was general support for the Clerk's recommended that the Finance and Policy Committee acts in future as a "Project Board", monitoring progress on major projects and prioritising work within available budgets and staff resources.

### **11. Draft budget for 2022-23 and community consultation**

It was noted that the Community Working Group had discussed a report on providing a Service Level Agreement to the Stroud Subscription Rooms Trust for work linked to the Council's Cultural Strategy and support for project management of building works. Concerns had been raised about the size of suggested payment. It was felt that this warranted further discussion and that the Sub Rooms Working Group should meet with the Trust to discuss further. This discussion to also explore how the Trust are supporting lower income families.

The Clerk noted that the Council were already funding a volunteer co-ordinator post and the fundraiser contract, and recommended that the budget provision remain pending further discussion about the potential Service Level Agreement.

The Clerk explained that a budget consultation survey was being drafted to check community support for the Council's strategic projects. The survey would be published as soon as possible to allow time for people to respond and for results to be collated in time for the Council meeting in January.

It was also noted that the Personnel Committee had not yet met to discuss staff budgets, and that this would need to happen in advance of the Council meeting in January. This should also include a discussion on the potential for a new Communications post.

#### **Actions:**

It was **agreed** to recommend approval of the draft budget to full Council on 17th January 2022 alongside the results of the community consultation and subject to a separate recommendation from the Personnel Committee on staffing budgets.

### **12. Bullying and Harassment policy**

The Working Group considered a draft Bullying and Harassment policy recommended by the joint NALC (National Association of Local Councils) and SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) Civility and Respect group.

Some concern was expressed about text which described "behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either councillors or council staff to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or threatened" as "totally unacceptable". Although it was recognised that there could be no excuse for threatening behaviour, it was felt that there might be times when councillors might be expected to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed if members of the public exercise their right to question or challenge council decisions, but it was acknowledged that it might be hard to draw a line beyond which behaviour becomes unacceptable.

#### **Actions:**

The Clerk was asked to refer this question back to the Civility and Respect Group and report back.

It was **agreed** to recommend approval of the policy to full Council, subject to further discussion on any response received from the Civility and Respect Group.

**13. VAT partial exemption calculation 2020-21**

The Working Group noted a report on the Council's VAT partial exemption calculation for 2020-21

The meeting closed at 22.02pm.

Chair .....

Date .....

## Appendix A – payments October 2021

Date Paid	Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid	Transaction Detail
01/10/2021	Royal British Legion Poppy Sho	5959	£21.98	Remembrance wreath
01/10/2021	DCK Accounting Solutions Ltd	9849	£246.00	Preparing VAT calc
01/10/2021	Lister Wilder	1432	£97.87	Keys and fobs
01/10/2021	SLCC Enterprises Ltd	3842	£360.00	Locum fees august
01/10/2021	Somerset County Council	21518	£63.60	Nox tubes august
01/10/2021	Stroud Alarms Fire and Securit	45920	£245.40	Replace bellboxes
01/10/2021	Stroud Office Supplies Ltd	87882	£34.73	Office supplies
01/10/2021	Thrupp Tyre Company Ltd.	3538	£65.00	New tyre renault
01/10/2021	Travis Perkins Trading Co Ltd.	BBP282	£62.64	Site materials
01/10/2021	Travis Perkins Trading Co Ltd.	BBP301	£11.60	Site materials
01/10/2021	Travis Perkins Trading Co Ltd.	BBP556	£48.73	Site materials
01/10/2021	T.W.HAWKINS & SONS	1462	£411.12	Contract mowing 7/7 - 31/8
01/10/2021	SDC	DD	£291.49	Council tax 58a/b
04/10/2021	Association of Accounting Tech	8992	£50.00	AAT membership S Dyte
05/10/2021	PortalPLanQuest Ltd	52v1	£490.00	Planning app fee
07/10/2021	Allstar Business Solutions Ltd	4026	£190.57	Fuel charges Sept
12/10/2021	TOWN CLERK IMPREST	Imprest	£1,000.00	Tfr bus to imprest
15/10/2021	SDC	DD	£1,068.00	Rates Cemetery/Libbys Drive
15/10/2021	Payroll	DD	£19,729.07	Payroll
15/10/2021	LGPS	BACS	£6,141.24	Oct Payroll-Pension
15/10/2021	HMRC	BACS	£5,447.39	Oct Payroll-PAYE
18/10/2021	Canva Pty Ltd	5914	£99.99	Subscription to Canva Pro
18/10/2021	J Parker Dutch Bulbs WS Ltd	4793	£341.32	Plants
18/10/2021	2commune Ltd	3407	£522.00	Website hosting/support/licenc
18/10/2021	All Done and Dusted	5676	£115.20	Cleaning at Thanet House
18/10/2021	BAILEY PARTNERSHIP	6188	£528.00	Project mgmt
18/10/2021	BPE Solicitors LLP	7716	£3,420.00	Professional charges
18/10/2021	BrightHR England	282	£362.88	Provision of services
18/10/2021	Childs and Sulzmann Ltd.	3293	£3,024.00	Thanet House refurbishment
18/10/2021	DENIS BROWN & SON (Nailsworth)	12020	£55.06	Site materials
18/10/2021	Down to Earth Stroud	0721A	£225.60	Gardening assistance July
18/10/2021	Down to Earth	0821A	£333.00	Gardening assistance Aug

Date Paid	Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid	Transaction Detail
	Stroud			
18/10/2021	Down to Earth Stroud	0921A	£186.00	Gardening assistance Sept
18/10/2021	EDF Energy	644	£34.05	Electricity 58b Thanet House
18/10/2021	HHGL Limited	9787	£45.40	Store purchases
18/10/2021	ICCM	13981	£324.00	Online training
18/10/2021	ITEC Support Ltd	3344	£519.63	IT Support
18/10/2021	Locking Hill Surgery	1165	£50.00	Letter re Julie Prockter
18/10/2021	Nadja Gajadharsingh	121	£1,220.00	Fundraising services Sept
18/10/2021	Nailsworth Garden Machinery	53108	£60.00	Battery trimmer repairs
18/10/2021	SAFPRO INDUSTRIAL SUPPLY	5616	£59.94	Safety boots
18/10/2021	SLCC Enterprises Ltd	3871	£246.00	Job advert services
18/10/2021	SLCC Enterprises Ltd	3888	£648.00	Locum fees Sept
18/10/2021	Smiths (Gloucester) Ltd	1582	£18.00	Recycling containers rental
18/10/2021	Stroud Electrical Services (UK	6318	£59.82	Replaced boiler back box
18/10/2021	Stroud Parish Churches	507	£105.00	Venue hire St Laurence hall
18/10/2021	Sunbelt Rentals Ltd	5315	£1,529.36	London Road closure Sept
18/10/2021	Thirsty Work Ltd.	5196	£40.74	Rental charges Thante House
18/10/2021	Hughes&Salvidge Holdings Ltd T	6183	£268.80	Skip exchange
18/10/2021	Water Plus Ltd.	6851	£36.87	Water charges Libbys Drive
18/10/2021	Dr E N Johnson	TRANSFERR	£135.41	TOTTS reimbursement
19/10/2021	Home Bargains	5328	£3.99	Disposable masks
19/10/2021	Renault Finance	5152OCT	£30.00	Battery for Renault
22/10/2021	Wilko	1388	£12.00	Hand gel
22/10/2021	Osborne Books Ltd	6331	£30.70	Adjustment on SLINV21_136331
22/10/2021	BLT Direct Ltd	9448	£56.08	Fluorescent 18 watt bulbs
22/10/2021	HMRC	BACS	£213.43	HMRC Underpayment September
22/10/2021	SDC	DD	£624.00	Rates Thanet House
22/10/2021	HMRC	TRANSFERR	£213.43	HMRC
22/10/2021	HMRC	TRANSFERR	-£213.43	HMRC
25/10/2021	Ecotricity	1784	£33.11	Electricity charges Libbys Dri
25/10/2021	Ecotricity	6471	£138.88	Electricity LLS Thanet House
25/10/2021	Lister Unified Communications	5739	£56.52	Mobile call charges sept
26/10/2021	EE Ltd	1738	£71.59	Mobile phone charges
29/10/2021	Konica Minolta Business Soluti	8149	£89.14	Photocopier charges