

Stroud District Council Report

May 2020



Service continuity

SDC staff absence figures remain low with only 8 staff (2.2%) absent in the week ending 22 May, and no Covid-19 related absences that week. Council meetings are now being held using Zoom and broadcast on the [SDC You Tube channel](#):

The waste and recycling kerbside services continue to run smoothly. The Grounds and Building Cleaning service resumed to business as usual from Monday 18th May. The bulky waste collection service re-started on 21 May.

Ubico are have set up new 'business as usual' workstreams to work out what the business service will look like under the 'new normal'.

New priority walking and cycling routes

Following the [statement from GCC](#) on 20 May, SDC has submitted proposals to the County Council for further discussion in relation to schemes in three locations in Stroud District, to make it easier to walk and cycle during and after the Covid-19 restrictions. SDC awaits confirmation from GCC of the next steps. Further prioritisation of the ideas may be necessary as details of funding available to districts are not yet clear. The proposals submitted are as follows:

1. Stroud Town Centre and Approaches

- (i) Stroud town centre to become a shared space with priority for walking and cycling over motor vehicles, pedestrian priority signage, extra road space for pedestrians in London Road, clear marking for cyclists to the station for cycle parking.
- (ii) Improvements to Wallbridge, Cainscross and Dr. Newton' Way roundabouts (cycle priority stop lines at all entrances and marked cycle lane across roundabouts).
- (iii) Improve and consolidate the existing cycle lane along Cainscross Road to Cainscross roundabout, widening the cycleway and filling in gaps with temporary bollards. Marked crossing at Marling, the High school and marked cycle lanes to Archway school.
- (iv) Dudbridge-Stonehouse route to continue through Stonehouse town centre (marked lanes from Horsetrough roundabout to the shared use section and marked lanes after the shared use section on along the B4008)
- (v) Temporary bollard within on road sections, resurface pavements sections and pinch point interventions on the A419 to provide safer on road cycling between Chalford and Stroud town centre.

2. Dursley Town Centre and Approaches

- (i) Improved cycle facilities in Dursley Town Centre e.g. Long Street Car Park and additional signage and linkages to the cycle way at Littlecombe.
- (ii) Temporary interventions to connect Dursley and Cam local centre (along Everlands and Chapel Street) with on road marking and temporary bollards.

3. Wotton under Edge / Kingswood

- (i) Improved cycle facilities in Wotton town centre (e.g. Chipping car park).
- (ii) Pavement and road improvements to allow safer cycling and walking between Wotton and Kingswood (KLB school to Kingswood pinch point) and access to Renishaw.

Test Trace and Isolate

The NHS Test and Trace Programme was launched on 28 May. As part of the new measures, councils are being asked to develop and implement tailored outbreak control plans to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their area. The plans will focus on identifying and containing potential outbreaks in places such as workplaces, housing complexes, care homes and schools, ensuring testing capacity is deployed effectively and assisting those self-isolating in their area who need help. This is being led of course by the Director of Public Health at the County Council but there will inevitably be a role for District Councils.

Guidance for business on restarting operations

The SDC environmental health team has been reviewing the latest Government guidance and have produced a new section on the SDC website explaining how to restart operations in a manner that protects employees and reduces the risk of coronavirus transmission.

Reopening high streets fund

On 24 May the Government has announced a new pot of £50m nationally to fund the short term measures needed to help high streets establish a safe trading environment as shops begin to reopen. The allocation for SDC is £106,463 (see guidance [here](#)). The fund is intended to cover activities relating to the following areas of work:

- Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies
- Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
- Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
- Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely

SDC are working on a plan to utilise this money. Although some elements of this work will relate to SDC, much may relate to work done by Town or Parish Councils and elements of the funding may well be transferred.

Financial support for businesses

Stroud District Council is administering a number of Government schemes of grants and business rate relief to help businesses through the Coronavirus pandemic

- the Business Support Grants Fund
- the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund

- a new Discretionary Business Fund – which will be up and running soon.

The new Discretionary Business Fund will be aimed at those businesses that still have high ongoing running costs and have experienced a significant drop in income due to the coronavirus restriction measures but were not eligible for the previous funds. SDC's fixed minimum allocation has been confirmed at £1.417m and the details of the scheme are expected to be available in June (date tbc). For more information local businesses should look for the Grant scheme portal on the SDC website

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Financial support to residents

The Council Tax Hardship Fund supports those claiming local council tax support, where they would be eligible for an additional discount of up to £150 on their council tax bill. SDC have now applied discounts to 1,252 council tax accounts where residents of the district who find themselves in hardship.

Between 25 March and 17 May, an additional 298 claims for council tax support were made, bringing the total number of claims to 3,545 in the District.

Universal Credit claims have also increased, with 299 new claims in March, 584 in April and 91 in May. A single claimant aged 25 or over receives £409.89 per month on Universal Credit. For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get>

Support for Community Groups

The total amount of grant awarded (on 22 May) was £35,716. Some of the immediate response work has steadied and slowed. The Gloucestershire Funders Group, (of which SDC is a member) will be holding a discussion on supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector into the 'recovery' phase of this work. The Funder Group is also planning a piece of research into the food poverty situation in the county. SDC are now asking all their community groups, including those who have received funding from the Community Resilience Fund, to complete a short survey that will help to provide a picture of how community support groups in the district are managing.

Planning – virtual site inspections

It has been agreed that while government measures for social distancing remain in place, the Development Control Committee Site Inspection Panel visits will be carried out by the case officer and Chairman of DCC. The sites will be recorded using audio video, which will be shared via a new WhatsApp group to include all DCC and relevant ward members. The group will also include senior planning officers and the case officers for the agenda items.

Changes to SDC Constitution

At a full council meeting on 18 May the Council approved proposals to amend the Constitution which were considered necessary to meet the challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis and enable the Council to hold remote meetings effectively. As a result, the Scheme of Delegation for the Chief Executive has been updated to allow delegated authority for her to take urgent decisions in

consultation with the Council Leader and other Group Leaders if time permits, or Chair of Committee (if appropriate) and the chief finance and legal officers.

It was also agreed to reduce the quorum for SDC meetings held remotely has been reduced from 50% to 25% of members for full council meetings, and from 50% to 33% of members for committee meetings.

The Green & Independent Group, supported by the Liberal Democrats and some Conservatives had argued that the quorum should not be reduced for remote meetings, to ensure that decisions were continued to be taken by a wide group of councillors. There is no evidence so far of lower attendance at remote meetings, and it was suggested that lowering the quorum was in any case, not the way to tackle low meeting attendance.

It was announced that Cllr Skeena Rathor (Stroud Central) has resigned from the Labour Party and will now sit as an independent. A vacancy has also been created by the resignation of Conservative Cllr Phil McCCasey (Amberley and Woodchester).

Compulsory Purchase Order – Cotswold Canals Connected

The Strategy & Resources Committee met on 21 May to consider the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers to acquire land to deliver the Cotswold Canals Connected (Phase 1b) project. This was required ahead of submitting the Delivery Stage bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund by 1 June. It was agreed unanimously to support the CPO which will give officers a good basis for negotiating with landowners to secure the necessary land ().

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded £842,800 in 2018 as Development Funding, to the Cotswold Canals Connected project (Phase 1b) enabling SDC and its partners to work towards submitting a further Delivery Stage bid, for in the order of £8.9 million, which is being prepared for the deadline of 1st June 2020.

The project's objective is to restore a 4-mile length of canal connecting the national waterway network at Saul Junction to the already restored 5-mile section running from Stonehouse to Thrupp. This would make Stonehouse and Stroud canal towns once again. The project will bring significant biodiversity, economic, leisure and health and wellbeing benefits. The paper notes that whilst Development funding from the HLF does not automatically guarantee a Delivery Stage pass, the HLF was clearly sufficiently impressed to award funding. Provided the project looks certain to deliver its outcomes to budget, there is no reason why the new further bid should not succeed.

Internal Audit - Audit & Standards Committee – 26 May

The Committee met to review the Annual Risk Based Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21 - .

Housing

The June Housing Committee meeting has been cancelled, as all agenda items have been deferred to future meetings. Housing Committee members received an informal briefing on current issues for the housing service via Zoom on 15 May.

For SDC council homes, there is a backlog of non-urgent repairs that have built up since the lockdown restrictions were in place. It's estimated that an additional two full time operatives will be required for 12 months to clear the backlog, and resources are in place to provide this.

Four Member Information Sheets on housing are due to be published in June: HC Governance & the Regulator of Social Housing; Older persons strategy action plan update; Annual update on the Armed Forces Covenant; Income management related to Covid-19.

SDC Recovery Strategy

On 27 May, members of Strategy and Resources Committee held an informal meeting with the Senior Leadership Team to consider the initial plans for a recovery strategy. The Strategy will continue to be developed as a result of those discussions and will be turned into a report to be discussed at the full meeting of the Committee in June.

Reopening of Public Conveniences

In April all public conveniences were closed to allow cleaning resource to be dedicated to the improved hygiene regimes for Ubico fleet vehicles. There is no government restriction on opening public toilets but there is of course an increased risk of transmission of the virus at these sites, since as soon as an individual uses the facilities there is the possibility of contamination for the next user. A much higher cleaning resource will be required for the reopening of public toilets – and this is currently challenging due to manpower and potential PPE requirements, so there is no prospect of these facilities reopening at the moment. The SDC Community Services Team continues to review central government guidance and is keeping the situation under constant review.

Shielding List - food parcels

Some local residents who are shielding have indicated that they no longer require food packages to be delivered to them through the Government shielding scheme. There are three ways to de-register to stop delivery of food boxes:

- Online: reregister at www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable and indicate that you do not require a food package by answering 'yes' to the question 'Do you have a way of getting essential supplies delivered at the moment?'
- Phone: re-register via the helpline number on their NHS letter. If an individual has already filled in the form re-registering then it will be processed and there is no need to complete it again.
- In person: by refusing the next food parcel that is delivered to their door (they can tell the driver they no longer wish to receive parcels). The driver will record this outcome on the system and they will be removed from the food parcels distribution list.

Request to share photos of messages of support

SDC's Museum staff are asking residents to share photos of messages of support for key workers and drawings of rainbows to document the current crisis and provide a historical record. Email any photo to museum@stroud.gov.uk or post it on the SDC or Museum in the Park Facebook pages. _