



STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

<http://lsp.stroud.gov.uk>

Meeting held on Friday 9 September 2022

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill

Theme: Cost of living challenges

Present:

Carole Stubbs (Chair)	Job Centre Plus, Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire District	Elizabeth Hall	CE, Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswolds
Russell Warner (Vice Chair)	Gloucestershire Area Lead, Federation of Small Businesses	Kerrin Cocks	Strategic Support Officer, GAPTC
Anna Herbert	Chief Executive Officer, OPENhouse	Paul Cruise	Stroud Inspector, Gloucestershire Police
Beth Whittaker	Stroud Businesswomen's Network	Will Mansell	The Grace Network
Cllr Catherine Braun	Leader of Council (in part)	Dr Roma Walker	Stroud League of Friends

Apologies and absent:

Alison Robinson	Chief Executive Officer, GAPTC	Martin Hughes	CEO, Lilian Faithfull Care
Alison Truphet	Executive Director, New Ventures Trust	Mary Hutton	Accountable Officer, NHS Glos Clinical Learning Group
Barbara Piranty	Chief Executive, GRCC	Matt Fellows	CEO, Age UK Gloucestershire
Brandon Watkins	SDYC Chair	Max Comfort	Director, Stroud Commonwealth
Cate James- Hodges	SDYC Leader	Cllr Natalie Bennett	Deputy Leader of Council
Chris Pockett	Head of Communications, Renishaw	Rachael Lythgoe	Corporate Communications Officer, Stroud District Council
David Owen	CE, Gfirst Local Enterprise partnership	Rebecca Fawkes	Local Risk Manager Stroud and the Cotswolds, Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue
Eilis Cope	Director, Cope Sales and Marketing Ltd	Sarah Scott	Commissioning Director Adults, Gloucestershire County Council
Fred Barker	Director, Transition Stroud	Simon Bernstein	Chief Executive, Longfield

Geoffrey Beckerleg	Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Stroud	Siobhan Baillie MP	MP for Stroud
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP	MP for The Cotswolds	Cllr Stephen Davies	Leader of the Opposition, Stroud District Council and Gloucestershire
Georgia Spooner	2030 Community Action Officer, Stroud District Council	Steve Miles	Senior Youth Officer, Stroud District Council
Helen Edwards	Deputy Director of Locality and Primary Care Workforce Development, Gloucestershire CCG	Dr Stuart Wilson	Head Teacher, Marling
Kathy O'Leary	Chief Executive, Stroud District Council	Sue Bailey	Sue Bailey Consulting
Kelly Richardson	Marketing and Fundraising Manager, Lilian Faithfull Care	Cllr Symon Ackroyd	Mayor of Dursley
Kevin Hamblin	Group Chief Executive Principal, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College	William Frazer	Group Secretary Gloucestershire, National Farmers' Union
Mark McShane	Head, Stroud High School		

Guests and Support Officers

Emma Keating-Clark	Community Health and Wellbeing Manager, Stroud District Council	Hannah Barton	LSP Co-ordinator, Stroud District Council
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1. Welcome, introductions, apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone and explained the decision not to cancel or postpone the meeting following the sad news yesterday of the death of Her Majesty the Queen. Given the timing of yesterday's announcement and the early start to the meeting today, it was felt there should be some presence in the Council Chamber in the event anyone had not had an opportunity to check their emails.

Discussion was had around postponing the meeting, however the attendees felt that continuing the meeting was necessary due to the urgent nature of the subject matter.

2. Cost of Living Crisis: what we are seeing now and what we are predicting for Autumn – Elizabeth Hall, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Stroud and the Cotswolds

Elizabeth gave an update on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to date.

Despite the Prime Minister's update yesterday regarding the price guarantee, this is still double what the price cap was last winter, and it is not yet clear how the newly announced price guarantee will impact the general public.

At CAB they have a national case recording system, so all support provided in Stroud feeds into the national data which is reported on by the media. At the moment CAB nationally are helping two people every minute with crisis support. This is a 50% increase on this time last year, and a 160% increase on the same period in 2019. This is due to the increasing number of people who cannot pay their bills or afford food no matter what they do.

So far this year, CAB have helped 50,000 people who could not afford to top up their pre-payment meters. This is before 1 October when prices will increase, the weather will get colder and it is anticipated one in four people will be unable to pay their energy bills. Energy bills are often higher if you are disabled or you are on a pre-payment meter, therefore the picture is even worse for those already on the lowest incomes. Stroud CAB are already receiving calls from people with medical devices that require a power supply who are panicking because they cannot top up their electricity meters. For people like this, often top-up vouchers cannot be provided quickly enough.

There is a dedicated foodbank advisor at Stroud CAB, and they have reported that the foodbank has had a 40% increase in client referrals compared to last year.

The cost-of-living payment issued in July stemmed the demand for additional support slightly, but this was a 'sticking plaster' that did not last. Some people had to use the payments intended for fuel to buy things like school uniform. Although another payment was due to be issued in Autumn, there has been no confirmation of exactly when this will be.

CAB try and take a holistic approach to supporting people and help to look at different avenues to help people, however they are finding now that often all other options have been exhausted and crisis funding is the only thing left available.

CAB are also under increasing demand from people who would like their benefit entitlement checked. There are delays in processing application for some disability benefits, which can be months. If a benefit entitlement is appealed this can take up to one year.

As well as those already on benefits, there are people on lower incomes who do not meet the criteria for benefits but who cannot see a way through on their current income. To arrange a debt relief order you must have a small surplus each month, therefore even this option is not available to help.

If you are already in food and/or fuel poverty, the update from the Prime Minister yesterday will not make a difference. Many are cancelling their direct debits and going into rent arrears. CAB are aware that many people are going into council tax arrears, and there are serious repercussions for not paying a priority debt such as this.

The cost-of-living crisis will lead to physical and mental health issues. There is concern for people with various conditions including respiratory illnesses, and there are

increasing reports of people in significant mental distress as well as safeguarding referrals due to people expressing suicidal thoughts.

Staff and volunteers at CAB may also be in a similar situation as the people they are trying to help, therefore it is important to be mindful of this and consider how to support them too. It is also upsetting for staff and volunteers to be dealing with people in such distress, particularly when the options available are 'sticking plasters' and not making a lasting difference.

The cost-of-living crisis has the potential to be worse than the pandemic, as most people were able to remain safe during the pandemic, and this crisis could affect more people.

Whilst this paints a bleak picture, it highlights the need for agencies to work together to understand what is going on and how we can help each other to help those in need.

3. Coping with the crises: time for local strategic partnership – Will Mansell, Founder, The Grace Network

Will gave an update on some ways in which the crisis could be approached. Whilst there are no obvious solutions to the cost-of-living crisis, some options like the community hubs are more promising than others.

It was noted that as a group and as individuals the LSP and its members have the power to help, and solidarity is one of the most important ways in which to do this.

This is not the only global crisis we have experienced in recent times. As we have become more and more connected by being able to communicate and travel faster, pandemics and illnesses travel faster and fake news spreads quicker. We need to think longer term about all future crises to avoid going over the same thing again and again.

Earlier this week an [article by Gordon Brown](#) was published in the Guardian stating that the new Prime Minister must realise that Britain's charities have done all they can do to help desperate people, and only the government has the resources to end the suffering caused by the cost-of-living crisis.

By thinking more boldly as a community about these issues we can address them better and provide some hope, particularly as the issues are likely to get harder. There are five types of capital in the world:

1. Financial – you can use money to help people and to buy things
2. Intellectual – how can we come up with good, clever ideas to help?
3. Physical – we need to look after ourselves and pick where we put our energy
4. Spiritual – how do we use our wisdom and apply this to situations?
5. Relational – we need relationships to support each other.

Though we may not always have money to help, there are four other types of capital we can invest.

Some of the work Stroud District Council is responsible for including the Community Hubs Plan, the Economic Development Plan, and the 2030 Strategy, are examples of work we can do now in this storm, that will help us weather storms in five years' time.

In terms of this particular cost of living crisis, there should be a focus on warm rooms/banks and making them warmer. GL11 is an excellent example of this. For Hubs like this to succeed, you need the physical space (like a community hall) in the first place, smart and effective brains to organise them, and good relationships to make them places worth going to.

The Hotspots Network recently potentially secured £230,000 in funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Bid and the Levelling Up Fund, and this is intended to be passed straight down to smaller organisations across the district to develop their own community hubs. This funding can also be leveraged to secure additional funding which can also be shared with other organisations.

The Grace Network are also trying their best to improve discourse at a local level, including with Parish Councils, District Council and within the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. If we can communicate more effectively, we have more chance of being successful.

Will challenged the LSP on their purpose and ability to impact strategies and policies. The LSP hear from a wide variety of speakers but to be effective the messages need to go to as a wide as possible an audience, and it should also be considered how the partnership can have an impact. It was suggested that the LSP could come up with a document covering today's talks, and potentially present it to those in more senior positions.

Note added following the meeting: The LSP notes are circulated to the membership which includes the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, and they are also available on the LSP website for the general public to view.

4. Partners' Updates

Dr Roma Walker, Stroud League of Friends:

- The Minor Injury and Illness Unit (MIU) at Stroud Hospital is now up and running and will be formally opened next week. Stroud League of Friends were able to contribute £515,000 to this project, upgrading it from what would otherwise have been a standard refurbishment.
- Over the last five years Stroud League of Friends have spent over £1.8million.
- As of 8 September, 94 beds in Gloucestershire community hospitals are occupied by people who are fit to be discharged but cannot be because of community support packages not being in place. This is 48% of all community hospital beds.
- They now extend their funding into the community, including one respite bed at Horsfall House in Minchinhampton funded throughout the year.
- Their next major venture is Hope for Tomorrow, mobile chemotherapy treatment. This has been funded for the entire year and they have committed for another three years.

- In the last few years, £423,000 has been spent on community support (outside of Stroud Hospital).
- Their next meeting is tonight (9 September) to determine what will be spent next.
- In terms of the purpose of the LSP, Dr Walker referenced a meeting she used to be a part of in the prison sector, which was very influential. Over the years some people would not attend, and a deputy would attend in their place, and it gradually ceased to have the same influence. This happened slowly, but it did eventually fizzle in. The pandemic has interrupted the LSP, and it may take a while to get the energy back, but the more influential people who can attend, the better it will function. This may be an opportunity to reinvent the group and introduce some new ideas.

Paul Cruise, Stroud Inspector, Gloucestershire Police:

- Stroud Constabulary are in 'Operation Flex' over the summer period due a lack of resources as a result of staff leave and increased demand. This has led to the temporary collapsing of neighbourhood teams, although the PCSO function is still in place.
- There has been a focus on violence against women and girls, including a meeting that was held in the Sub Rooms, with another planned in January to keep the momentum.
- Following an attack at Dudbridge roundabout, this area has been transformed and is now safer. They are also pushing forwards with a safe space.
- PCSOs are heavily focussed on community building, and they have contacts with the most vulnerable people in communities, so they should be kept in the loop regarding ways to support people with the cost-of-living crisis.

Anna Herbert, Chief Executive Officer, OPENHouse:

- OPENHouse provides housing and support to those at risk of homelessness, therefore they deal with the most vulnerable people in society.
- The five types of capital Will covered in his talk are broadly what OPENHouse focus on: secure housing, emotional management, financial management, mental health, and a supportive network.
- OPENHouse currently have a huge problem as their residents cannot afford to move into their own self-contained accommodation, but their funders want them to be moved on sooner. Some residents are so adamant they do not want to leave, they close their bank accounts and take up drugs so they will not be moved on.
- Sometimes residents are being moved on too soon, and then return to OPENHouse far worse. Moving the residents on too soon also just moves the problem to other places in the areas.
- They are a tiny charity that is poorly funded, and because their staff are poorly paid, they are also feeling the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.
- They are trying to find creative ways around really difficult problems.
- OPENHouse have a good relationship with the police in Stroud, however they recently called for help and were informed there were no cars available for someone to attend to them.
- Will from The Grace Network has been offered modern modular homes that are designed to be paid for using single person housing benefit, they just need land

to put them on and planning permission. This was suggested as an option for OPENHouse residents.

Kerrin Cocks, Strategic Support Officer, GAPTC:

- GAPTC are hosting monthly networking sessions on specific topics although the next one might be postponed due to the national mourning period. They are considering hosting an emergency session in early October on the cost-of-living crisis and would like to invite the speakers from today's meeting.
- Town and Parish Councils are the closest to communities and have the potential to have a lot of power and be leaders in these crises.
- GAPTC are running a big media campaign to inform the general public of what they do and what they can do. They hope to encourage people to get involved with their local Town or Parish Council if they are a community-minded person.
- This is ahead of local elections in May 2023, as GAPTC are hoping for contested positions not vacancies and co-opted members.
- GAPTC have heard from Town and Parish Councils that they receive ineffective and inconsistent communication from the police, and GAPTC have offered to help be the conduit between residents, Town and Parish Councils, and the police.
- Rodborough Parish Council recently had a community meeting about the attacks in Stroud and had a huge response.

Russell Warner, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Gloucestershire Area:

- Small businesses are struggling with rising energy costs. Whilst the government's announcement on 8 September seems positive, it is unclear what this will actually be.
- Businesses at all levels cannot recruit staff. There is a shortage of people to fill roles.
- There is a big issue of business survival as we move through this cost-of-living crisis.

Stroud District Council:

- Emma Keating-Clark, Community Health and Wellbeing Manager at SDC, is happy to be contacted about anything covered at today's meeting and to help link people together.
- Cllr Catherine Braun is now the Leader of Council, having previously been Deputy Leader.
- SDC are waiting to hear about the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity bids, and whether these will still be funded following the changes in government.
- £400,000 has been assigned to Stroud as a rural area, and the first round of funding was three times oversubscribed.
- Following the sad news of Her Majesty the Queen's death on 8 September, the focus is on arranging various events such as the Proclamation and postponing other meetings over the next week or so.
- A motion is coming to the Community Services and Licensing Committee on 15 September on the cost-of-living emergency.

Carole Stubbs, Department of Work and Pensions:

- DWP are holding a jobs fair every month and doing everything they can to get people into work.

- They have done really well getting Ukrainian refugees into work. The biggest barrier is when the refugees cannot speak English, and they are considering ways to overcome this.

Chair of LSP:

- Discussion was had around repeating this meeting again for those who were unable to attend, as this message is so important. It was suggested that the meeting could be opened up wider than just LSP members, possibly in a special session. This could also be the spur for later LSP meetings and growing the membership.
- The County Council recently held a Levelling Up conference, and this format could be utilised for a cost-of-living 'conference' or larger meeting. This should involve community groups and Town and Parish Councils.
- **Note added following the meeting:** Due to the importance of this topic and the strength of support shown at the LSP meeting, SDC's Community Health and Wellbeing team will be coordinating a wider event on the cost-of-living crisis which will include what has been discussed at the LSP meeting.

Please send any requests for future agenda items or suggestions for future meeting themes to Hannah Barton, hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk

Next meeting

Friday 25 November

2023 meeting dates – TBC

March

June

September

December

The meetings are 9:00am for a 9:15am start, with meeting end by 11:30am.