

Cabinet

Monday, 9 September 2019

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Lee Croxton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Shane Mochrie-Cox
 Lenny Rolles
 Brian Sangha
 Narinder Singh Thandi
 Jenny Wallace

Note: Councillors Dakota Dibben, Bob Lane, Leslie Hoskins, Diane Marsh, Jordan Meade and Alan Ridgers were also in attendance.

David Hughes	Chief Executive
Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Nick Brown	Director (Housing and Operations)
Kevin Burbidge	Director (Planning and Development)
Daniel Killian	Assistant Director (Housing Assets)
Sarah Parfitt	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Simon Walsh	Service Manager (Communities)
Bal Chattha	Compliance & Projects Manager
Shazad Ghani	Planning Manager (Policy)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager

15. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2019 were signed by the Chair.

16. Declarations of Interest

Cllr John Burden declared an interest in agenda item 17 (Future use of land at North East Gravesend) as the company he worked for currently had a charge on one of the plots being considered. Cllr Burden left the Chamber during consideration of this item.

17. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

18. Corporate Plan: 2019-23

The Director (Corporate Services) informed the Cabinet that the Corporate Plan presented the Council's ambition for the Borough over a four-year period. Alongside a suite of corporate objectives and associated policy commitments, the Corporate Plan will set the tone and guiding principles from which all Council activity will be based over the 2019-23 period.

The Council's current Corporate Plan ran for the 2015-19 period. Work had been carried out by officers over the last year to draft and implement a new Corporate Plan reflective of community needs and aspirations, the key ambitions of the elected administration for the Borough over the 2019-23 period and, ultimately, the financial position of the Council.

To commence the project, a 12-week public consultation exercise commenced in November 2018 and over 800 responses were received from Gravesham residents, businesses and community groups providing over 2,500 individual pieces of information and intelligence relating to community requests for Council provision and priority intervention. The exercise also enabled participants the opportunity to rank each of the Council's key services in terms of their individual level of perceived importance. The information obtained from this process was collated and analysed and acted as a sound baseline throughout the development of the policy commitments in the draft Corporate Plan.

In addition to the public consultation, the new Corporate Plan had been prepared in full consideration of a base of intelligence relating to community needs as detailed in the Council's Gravesham Community Profile. The comprehensive study included a variety of datasets, including local health data outlining core public health concerns for the resident population and, in addition, the study considered key existing strategies the Council currently had in place, including the Local Plan Core Strategy.

At the heart of the new Corporate Plan, there will be three corporate objectives, each with their own portfolio of activities and initiatives but, importantly, designed to work with and support each other for the benefit of the local community:

- #1 People: a proud community; where residents can call a safe, clean and attractive Borough their home;
- #2 Place: a dynamic Borough; defined by a vibrant and productive local economy taking advantage of growth in the area, supported by its strong and active community; and
- #3 Progress: an entrepreneurial authority; commercial in outlook and committed to continuous service improvement, underpinned by a skilled workforce and strong governance environment.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised that, alongside the development of the new Corporate Plan, a full review was also being undertaken into the existing Performance Management Framework (PMF) to ensure that the Council continued to effectively achieve against its stated objectives and deliver a consistently high quality services for local residents. The PMF will form the basis of corporate performance reporting to Members during the 2019-23 period.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the new Corporate Plan will be presented to the next meeting of Full Council on 8 October 2019 for formal adoption. Following formal adoption, the plan will be officially launched.

With regard to the PMF, the Cabinet stressed the importance of qualitative data and that consideration also needed to be given to those measures that the Council had no direct control over e.g. crime statistics.

It was also requested that the new Corporate Plan be proofread prior to formal adoption as typographical errors had been noticed.

The Cabinet thanked the Corporate Performance Team on the work that had been undertaken to date.

Resolved that the draft Corporate Plan 2019-23 (Appendix 2) be endorsed subject to it being proofread and delegated authority be given for any further updates to be made by the Director (Corporate Services) in consultation with the Leader of the Executive, prior to submission to Full Council for formal approval and adoption.

19. Annual Review of the Legal Shared Service

The Cabinet was provided with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Legal shared service with Medway Council in accordance with the Council's Working in Partnership Framework.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised that the shared service had a second successful year and drew Member's attention to appendix two of the report which detailed the objectives and key areas of focus that had been met.

The review identified that there had been some staff shortages in the Information Governance (IG) Team that had impacted on the service and an audit undertaken in May 2019 recommended that: "An arrangement should be put in place to ensure engagement takes place between working group lead officers and IG, with Wider Management Team receiving progress updates on GDPR compliance and once implementation has progressed sufficiently, a compliance framework should be put in place." Therefore, the Corporate Change Team had been commissioned to produce an action plan identifying key areas of focus for the IG Team moving forward.

The Cabinet welcomed the additional resilience referred to in the report and stated that this together with an improved response time needed to be a key priority moving forward.

The Cabinet commended the support that had been provided by Legal Services at formal meetings.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

20. Annual Review of the HR Shared Service

The Cabinet was provided with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the HR shared service with Medway Council in accordance with the Council's Working in Partnership Framework.

The Director (Corporate Services) drew Member's attention to appendix two of the report which detailed the objectives that had been met.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised that one of the key priorities moving forward will be the recruitment of additional resource to provide a more permanent solution and increase the HR presence at both sites.

The Cabinet stated that Gravesham needed to continue to have a good working relationship with the union.

The Chief Executive advised that Gravesham had established a Joint Staff Forum which consisted of HR, the union and staff representatives.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

21. Main store roof at Brookvale

The Director (Housing and Operations) advised that Potter Raper had been retained to provide a feasibility study relating to the future use of the Brookvale site and a significant precursor for future use would be for the roofs to be in a good condition.

As a starting point a camera survey was undertaken to obtain an understanding of the current condition of the roofs and it was revealed that they were in need of significant work.

Prices were obtained from the Breyer Group, the Council's term contractor, in order to understand the level of outlay required. Three options were given together with an estimated price for each which had been set out in sections two and three of the report. It was recommended that option two be progressed which would replace the single skin sheet with new Plastisol coated 120mm thick composite roof panels (coating one side) to include new double skinned GRP roof lights to the existing layout.

The Director (Housing and Operations) advised that, although not included in the above estimates, a project group had been looking at how better use can be made of the large training room at Brookvale and the office area below. Limited natural light affects both areas and the roof works would provide an opportunity to have more natural light to the first floor office and potentially the office below. It was therefore proposed that additional rooflights/wells relating to these offices be added to the specification. The feasibility of fixing solar panels to the new roof will also be investigated as part of the project and will be added if viable.

The Chair advised that the above works would require the 2019/20 capital programme to be amended therefore Full Council approval would be required.

Resolved that the Cabinet recommends to Full Council that option 2 be progressed and the Director (Communities) in consultation with the Director (Housing & Operations) and Assistant Director (Corporate Services) be authorised to appoint consultants to tender the roof replacement of the main store at Brookvale with the results of the tender being reported to Cabinet prior to acceptance.

22. Housing Delivery Action Plan

The Planning Manager (Policy) advised that, to meet the Government's requirement as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance, Local Planning Authorities who had delivered less than 95% of their respective housing requirements between 2015-2018 were required to produce and publish an Action Plan that assesses the causes of housing under delivery and identifies actions to increase delivery in future years.

The Government intended to publish the Housing Delivery Test results in November each year however the results for the current period were only published on 19 February 2019. The results covered the period 2015 – 2018. For the period of 2015-2018, the Council had scored 64% in the Housing Delivery Test. This result means that the Council will need to produce an Action Plan as per the requirements of the NPPF. The Action Plan analyses the causes of under delivery and demonstrates the Council's commitment to responding positively to the challenge of increasing housing delivery.

The Planning Manager (Policy) advised that, due to the nature of the Borough's land supply, the Housing Delivery Action Plan would need to be kept under review. Work was being undertaken by Officers on a regular basis to identify why major sites in the Borough had stalled or to identify any issues which may be impeding delivery with a view to working with developers to overcome these issues. This work would continue and work on the Local Plan would be expedited as the Housing Delivery Action Plan on its own would not address the land supply issues in the Borough.

The Cabinet acknowledged the need to identify sites for development and welcomed the proposal for officers to work with developers to progress stalled sites within the Borough.

The Leader stated that the Council was also looking at its own sites to bring forward affordable housing however stated that Ward Councillors must be consulted on the proposed sites to ascertain whether development would be appropriate or not.

The Chief Executive advised that the Government was looking at initiatives to sanction developers and strengthen the powers of local authorities to support the buildout of stalled sites including a more active use of compulsory purchase powers.

The Cabinet supported the use of compulsory purchase powers for stalled sites.

Resolved that the Housing Delivery Action Plan be approved and published on the Council's website.

23. Local Plan Review

The Planning Manager (Policy) advised that to meet the Government's requirement as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), Local Authorities were required to review the policies within their adopted local plans in order to assess whether they needed updating. Reviews should be completed no later than five years from the adoption date of a plan. Such reviews were also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012 (as amended).

The Borough's Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted by Full Council on 30 September 2014. Therefore, the review must be completed by 30 September 2019.

The Planning Manager (Policy) drew Member's attention to the review as set out at appendix two of the report and highlighted that CS02 (Scale and Distribution of Development) will require modification in respect of the Borough's objectively assessed development needs.

As stated in minute 22, the Leader reiterated that there will be a need to identify sites for development and invited all Members to work with the Labour Group to consider the best options for meeting the Borough's needs.

The Planning Manager (Policy) advised that failing to identify sufficient land could mean that decisions would be taken out of the hands of the Council and made by the Planning Inspectorate and/or an external team appointed by the Government. The Planning Manager (Policy) advised that he would provide Member of the Cabinet with a copy of the relevant legislation outside of the meeting.

Resolved that the Local Plan Review be approved and published on the Council's website.

24. Budget Monitoring Report 2019/20 – Quarter One

The Cabinet received the first budget monitoring report for 2019/20 showing the position up to 30 June 2019.

The Cabinet noted the information provided on:-

- actual performance against the approved Revenue and Capital budgets for 2019/20, including known variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity; and
- other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan, HRA Business Plan or Financial Statements.

The fact that the budget was being well managed was acknowledged and appreciated by the Cabinet. Officers confirmed that the Council will continue to maintain robust budgetary control actions to ensure good financial governance and respond to the pressures on the Council's finances.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) provided the Cabinet with an overview of the one year spending review announcement and advised that it was better than expected.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report and thanked the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) and her team on the work that had been undertaken to date.

25. Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors in Council Owned Housing

The Assistant Director (Housing Assets) advised that Gravesham Borough Council had a duty of care to its tenants to ensure that their health and safety would not be put at risk through the use of gas appliances and installations. The Council also had a responsibility under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 which require landlords to adequately and competently install, maintain and service all gas installations, appliances, flues and installation pipe work under their liability, specifically installations within its housing stock.

Under current regulations in Scotland and Northern Ireland, it was also a requirement that all residential properties whether that be in the private rented sector or social housing sector have CO detectors installed anywhere a combustion appliance was installed. This would include all gas or solid fuel appliances. However, in England the regulations were different and only apply to the private rented sector and not to social housing.

Although there was no legal obligation on the Council to install CO detectors, the Council, as a landlord takes the health and safety of its tenants very seriously. In addition to other safety measures already installed in Council owned properties, the installation of CO detectors would provide increased protection for tenants and their families in their homes.

To install a CO detector in all applicable Council owned housing, approximately 5,000 properties, it would cost in the region of £175,000. Swale Heating had confirmed that it could commence installation week commencing 2 October 2019 which would be carried out during the annual gas servicing visit. Once installed, the detectors would be checked annually and recorded on the Landlord's Gas Safety Record (LGSR) which would form part of the existing arrangement with Swale Heating with no additional cost.

The Assistant Director (Housing Assets) advised that significant savings had been achieved through proactive reprofiling of work programmes and the reprocurement of gas installation and servicing contract as detailed in section two of the report. It was proposed that the cost of installing CO detectors could be met from these savings.

Resolved that the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in all Gravesham Borough Council housing stock where a fuel burning appliance is installed be approved.

26. DSO Building Management Policies and Management Plans

The Assistant Director (Housing Assets) advised that, as a Landlord, the Council had a duty of care to its tenants to ensure that their health and safety would not be put at risk. This would be achieved by ensuring that all relevant regulatory and legislative requirements were met and monitored for compliancy.

The Assistant Director (Housing Assets) advised that the DSO Building Management Team at Brookvale had undergone significant change over the last three years with a restructure undertaken to align the service to meet the responsive, planned works and compliancy needs. As part of this period of change, new processes and procedures had been put in place to ensure that tenants were kept safe in their homes whilst also ensuring legislative and regulatory compliance.

Therefore, the following six policies had been developed in conjunction with colleagues, external agencies and Members to not only reinforce the new working practices but to allow transparency and provide accountability within the service:-

- Asbestos Policy & Management Plan;
- Gas Safety Policy & Management Plan;
- Water Hygiene Policy and Scheme of Control for Legionella Bacteria;
- Lift Maintenance Policy & Management Plan;
- Construction & Maintenance Safety Policy & Management Plan; and
- Fire Safety Policy & Management Plan.

The draft policies had been submitted to the Housing Cabinet Committee on 3 July 2019 for comments and discussion. The policies were commended and a decision was made to recommend to the Cabinet that the six policies be adopted.

The policies will be subject to an annual review or when there is a significant change to either the regulatory or legislative requirements.

Resolved that the policies relating to Asbestos Management, Gas Safety, Water Hygiene and Scheme of Control for Legionella Bacteria, Lift Maintenance, Construction and Maintenance Safety and Fire Safety in Council owned housing as recommended by the Housing Cabinet Committee in July 2019 be adopted.

27. Exclusion

Resolved pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded during the following item of business because it was likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that, if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

28. Future use of land at North East Gravesend

Vice-Chair in the Chair

The Cabinet was presented with a report which sought approval to undertake a master planning exercise for land at North East Gravesend and to enter into negotiations with two current landowners with a view to either acquiring their property or entering into an agreement to bring forward the area in a coordinated and comprehensive manner in order to maximise development potential and improve the area more generally.

The Cabinet was advised that the sites detailed in the report were prime development sites for the area. There would a risk that, without a considered, co-ordinated approach to the site in its entirety, the full benefits for the community would not be realised. There was a desire to develop the overall site to promote health and well-being through carefully planned green spaces, introducing residential sites with retail outlets to support the community and development of complimentary employment use in the area.

The Cabinet expressed concern regarding the connectivity and infrastructure within the area and stated that this will need to be a key priority.

Resolved that:-

1. authority be granted for the Council to engage consultants in a master planning exercise for the area as set out in section three of the report; and
2. delegated authority be granted for the Director (Planning & Development) and the Director (Corporate Services), in consultation with the Commercial Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive, to enter into negotiations with the owner of Plot one with a view to acquiring their land holding in the first instance including any overage provision as necessary; secure a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the area more widely through negotiation with the owner of Plot six and the land at Dalefield Way to the east of the Denton Caravan Site; and work with the owner of Plot one on a cohesive development proposal should agreement of terms for land acquisition not prove possible, as set out within section four of the report.

Note: Cllr John Burden left the Chamber during consideration of this item.

29. Write Offs

The Cabinet was presented with Business Rates and Housing Benefits debts over £15,000 that had now become irrecoverable.

Resolved that authority be given to write-off the debts listed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report.

Close of Meeting

The meeting ended at 9.25pm