



Council

Tuesday, 25 June 2019

Dear Councillor

You are advised that the attached documents form part of the main agenda papers for this meeting.

Please ensure you bring them with you to the meeting.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Walsh', written in a cursive style.

S Walsh
Service Manager (Communities)

List of documents attached

4. To answer any questions received from members of the public of which notice has been given under Council Procedure Rule 13 (Pages 3 - 4)

A question has been received from Richard Bayfield on behalf of Leo.

5. Minutes of Committees

- c) Minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 11 June 2019 (Pages 5 - 12)
- d) Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory Board (Planning) held on Wednesday, 12 June 2019 (Pages 13 - 20)
- e) Minutes of the meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 13 June 2019 (Pages 21 - 24)

To consider reports from officers of the Council

- Appointments to Outside Body (Elizabeth Huggins' Cottages Charity) (Pages 25 - 26)

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Question from Richard Bayfield on behalf of Leo:

Hello, my name is Leo. I am 6 years old. I would like to ask you some questions about climate change, it's very important to me because it is affecting our planet. The planet is getting hotter. People are dying. It is interesting and healthy for us to understand this. I don't think climate change will affect me because I am safe, but it is affecting a lot of other people in the world and I do not like it. Would you consider having a selection of children and young people on the Council to help make decisions about climate change? It will affect us the most.

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Finance & Audit Committee

Tuesday, 12 June 2019

7:30pm

Present:

Cllr Gurbax Singh (Chair)
Cllr Colin Caller (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Derek Ashenden
 Dakota Dibben
 Sarah Gow
 Nirmal Khabra
 Ruth Martin
 Tony Rice
 Frank Wardle

Sarah Parfitt	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
James Larkin	Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services
Alexandra Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer)
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

1. Apologies for absence

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Ejaz Aslam; Cllr Frank Wardle substituted. Apologies of absence were also received from Stuart Bobby and the two representatives from Grant Thornton, Elizabeth Jackson and Emily McKeown.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on Tuesday, 12 March 2019 were signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Annual Audit & Counter Fraud Report 2018-19

The Chair welcomed the new Members to the Committee and gave an introduction as to how he wanted the Committee to run and how they could all work together apolitically to make things run smoothly and efficiently during their time as Committee Members. Each of the Members and officers present also gave an introduction of who they were and their ward/job title.

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services appreciated that the Members were new to the Committee and informed them that that he would send out the Annual Workplan document, which was approved by the Committee in March 2019, and other various significant documents after the meeting which would help with their understanding of Audit & Counter Fraud reports.

The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service has provided update reports to Members at three meetings of the Finance & Audit Committee in 2018-19. The Annual Report reproduced the findings reported in those Update reports along with the results of work carried out since the last update, to provide Members with a summary of all the work delivered by the team in the year.

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services informed Members of the Audit & Counter Fraud work completed during 2018-19 and presented them with his opinion, as Chief Audit Executive, on the council's internal control environment.

The opinion and the reasoning behind it was listed on page 16 of the report; the opinion stated that: *'It is therefore my opinion that Gravesham Borough Council's framework of governance, risk management and system of internal control is adequate and effective, and contributes to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources in achieving the council's objectives.'*

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services drew Members attention to key areas highlighting that:

- For the year year 2018/19, the Audit & Counter Fraud Plan for Gravesham was prepared with a resource budget of 660 days. As of 31 March 2019, the net staff days available for Gravesham for 2018-19 amounted to 583 days and 503 days (86%) were spent on productive audit and counter fraud work
- Non-productive work was classified as 'non-chargeable' time spent such as doing general admin work, timesheets and meetings etc
- The internal audits which were listed in the report from pages 19-42 use a traffic light rating system for their final opinions. In their simplest terms; **green** meant good overall, **amber** meant generally okay with some areas that needed reviewing and **red** meant there were significant issues that needed addressing
- The Audit & Counter Fraud Team have 24 performance measures which are detailed in the Quality and Assurance Improvement Programme on page 43; the programme is approved by the Committee during the year
- The cost of the Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service to Gravesham was £193,242 which contributed to the overall cost of £536,785
- The total value of fraud losses identified totalled £166,760 which meant the service was almost completely self-financing through their work
- The service delivered 95% of its agreed Workplan which was on target and the proportion of recommended actions implemented by the agreed date was 91.6% which equated to very high performance
- With regard to the follow up of agreed recommendations; Management Team receive quarterly reports advising them on the progress of the audit recommendations and if a recommendation is still outstanding after six months then it is brought to the Committees attention. Management Team provided an update on page 54 of the report the two recommendations that were outstanding
- The external audit of the service was undertaken by Tonbridge & Malling Council and vice versa; they used a five tier traffic light system

The officers of the Committee fielded questions and comments from Members, explaining that:

- The Finance & Audit Committee is not a decision making body but it can make recommendations to Full Council; many reports ask for Members endorsement of the work that is carried out through the year which meant that Members effectively confirm that they have received sufficient assurances from officers to fulfil their governance role. Additionally by Members giving their endorsement, they state that they are happy with the results and findings of the reports they have been given
- When Members 'Note' a report, they recognise and are happy with the work undertaken by the service
- The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) confirmed that a one page executive summary listing the greens, ambers and reds of all the internal audit recommendations could be listed at the start of the report to make it easier for Members
- The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services stated that if any individual audit with a red opinion would be discussed with the Section 151 Officer and Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee to determine whether it presented a financial risk exceeding £25K or affected the achievement of the core objectives, , in which case the full report for that audit would be brought to the Committee. Not all red audits were deemed significant issues to the Council and the previous Chair felt that the 2 red audits stated in the report did not meet the criteria to bring them to the Committee
- When recommendations are made for improvements in controls, the Audit & Counter Fraud Team go back to the audited service on an agreed upon date to check to see if the recommendations have been implemented rather than doing a full audit again the following year as this means the same services could be audited frequently with some others not being picked up
- The Council used to have six petty cash flows which, after being audited, were identified as not being controlled very well; as of 31 March 2019 four have been closed down and in the Civic Centre there is now only one petty cash float which is held by Finance. The last remaining petty cash float is at Brookvale due to them being located away from the Civic Centre however a review will be conducted in the summer to see what they use their petty cash for and if they still require a petty cash float

Resolved that Members:

- Endorsed the work undertaken by the Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service for Gravesham during 2018-19 in providing an effective service to the council
- Considered and endorsed the opinion on the council's internal control environment provided by the Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service

5. Results of Audit & Counter Fraud Satisfaction Survey

The Committee was informed of the results of a survey aimed at identifying the level of satisfaction with the services provided by the Audit & Counter Fraud Team.

The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service with Medway Council has been in operation since March 2016, with 2018-19 being the third full year of operation. It was felt to be an appropriate time to issue a survey to Officers and Members of both organisations to receive feedback on the satisfaction with the services provided by the Audit & Counter Fraud Team. The report at Appendix 2 provided the detailed results of the responses received from respondents within Gravesham Borough Council and the overall response rate was around

30%, which was seen to be a good level of responses when compared to other surveys. Appendix 3 to showed the combined results of the Satisfaction Survey from Gravesham and Medway Councils.

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services explained that overall the satisfaction was largely positive, as seen in the Executive Summary on page 62, and he would be appealing to the respondents with negative responses to remove their anonymity so that a discussion could be had with them about why they felt that the service they received was unsatisfactory. Any discussions that were had with Service Managers regarding any issues would help the Team to improve their overall service within the two authorities.

Responding to a question regarding people disagreeing that 'the findings were accurate' on page 68, the Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services stated that there were a few issues in the early days of the shared service as, effectively, four terms were merged into one. Essentially, those disagreeing stemmed from a few inaccuracies that were found in some reports and steps have been taken to address those issues; that is why there are now meetings ahead of the draft report process where the auditors will sit with clients and attempt to iron out any inaccuracies before draft reports are shared with clients.

Resolved that Members:

- Noted the results of the Audit & Counter Fraud satisfaction survey 2018-19

6. Annual Treasury Management Review 2018-19

Members were advised of the treasury management activity during 2018-19 in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) revised code on Treasury Management (2017).

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) stated that the Council was required to produce a minimum of three reports on Treasury Management every year and under the Local Government Act 2003 had to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2018-19.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) explained that there were two main funds that were dealt with in finance which Members would receive reports on:

- General Fund – The General Fund is used to manage day to day services such as income and expenditure relating to frontline services to the public and other council departments with the exception of Council Housing. It is funded through sources such as Council Tax, business rates, grants, fees and charges
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) –The HRA is a ring-fenced account meaning it cannot be subsidised by the General Fund; it accounts for income and expenditure which are directly related to Council housing stock. The HRA generates income through rental incomes and service charges and its expenditure is the cost of the housing department as well repairs and maintenance of the housing stock so that this is maintained to a reasonable standard

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) guided Members through the report giving an introduction to each of the below sections, highlighting the key figures in each:

- The Council's Capital Expenditure and Financing – Page 80
- The Council's Overall Borrowing Need – Page 80
- Treasury Management Position as at 31 March 2019 – Page 83
- The Investment Strategy and Control of Interest Rate Risk for 2018/19 – Page 85
- Borrowing Strategy and Control of Interest Rate Risk Rates in 2018-19 – Page 86
- Borrowing Outturn for 2018/19 – Page 87
- Investment Outturn for 2018-19 – Page 87

Following a series of questions regarding the Property Funds and Multi-Asset Funds that the Council holds, on page 88 of the report, the Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) explained that:

- Only the Property Fund Managers are able to change the weighting of the asset classes within each fund as they react to the economy; JP Morgan have reduced their exposure to the equity market recently due to a sharp decline in the performance of this asset type. GBC have monitored the funds regularly and will continue to have regular meetings with the Managers who hold the Council funds so that the Council is aware of nature of assets held in each investment fund.
- The Council could choose to disinvest from a Fund if it was unhappy with the type of assets it was investing in by taking out all or a proportion of its interest out of that Fund; the Treasury Management Strategy allows the Council to invest a maximum of £8 million in a single Property Fund or Multi Asset Fund
- A Multi-Asset Fund spreads the risk by holding assets in different asset classes such as cash, equity or bonds which are used as an investment
- Lothbury hold properties mainly in London, with some in Covent Garden which are exposed to the retail market. Lothbury also purchased Property for redevelopment into student accommodation in Oxford
- Hermes mainly buys properties in London which offer a very good rate of commercial return but can also be used for alternative uses. They have a lot of properties on the Thames and frequently sell properties in their portfolio to residential developers
- The CCLA Property Fund is only allowed to be used by Local Authorities and they have properties in Manchester; they have a very different strategy which, in the council's view is less precise than the other Funds so the Council invested a smaller sum of money with them
- The Council hired Link Asset Services as their investment advisor and Link helped the Finance Team to design a questionnaire which was sent to all the Asset Managers before any investment was made. Many of the Property Funds were very eager to convince Local Authorities to invest with them. In addition to the questionnaire, a selection Panel made of GBC officers and Link staff allowed presentations to be given by individual Fund Managers and for questions to be asked and answered. Once the selection Panel had discussed and developed a proposal for investing with the Property Funds, this was taken to the Property Acquisitions cross party working group for further debate and discussion, with the working group advising on the final placing of monies with individual funds.
- The issues that KCC have recently been facing with their investments in the Woodford Fund are completely different to Gravesham's situation as the Woodford Fund invested solely in companies whereas Gravesham's investments were in properties and assets. Disinvesting and receiving money back from failing companies is a lot more difficult than trading assets and selling properties so Gravesham's investments have a lower level of risk

- With regards to Capital Loss in the table at 8.5, the Funds sometimes lose a small percentage of the value that was invested into the Property Fund but the investment still provides the Council with an income return; the interest is paid over to the Council so even though the capital value has lowered, the Council is still making a revenue return on these investments. These were taken out a long term investments.
- A copy of the Treasury Management Strategy will be emailed out to all Members after the meeting
- During the review process, all Property Fund Managers are questioned about ethical investments and the Council receives assurances that all investments are ethical

A Member raised concern over the multi-million pound deal with Reef regarding the refurbishment of the St Georges Centre and the Heritage Quarter and asked that more information be given to them so that they could better understand the deal and the lease terms.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) stated that she would provide a briefing note, based on that given to the external auditors, regarding the Reef deal to Members and then review the agenda for the upcoming Local Government Finance explained training session and Statement of Accounts training session to see if a more detailed discussion on the matter could be included.

Following a question regarding the NHS occupied second floor of the Civic Centre, the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised that she could not comment on the NHS property strategy but their rental income helped to support the General Fund.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) explained that authorised limit was the maximum level of borrowing that the Council could potentially be exposed to; the operational boundary is the most likely level of borrowing the Council may need to take on to manage its operations; The authorised limit is intended to prevent the Council from borrowing more than is required, but provides some ability to manage unusual circumstances affecting its cash position, such two payroll runs or two creditor runs being taken from the council bank account. .

Resolved that Members:

- Noted the contents of the report
- Recommended to Full Council that:
 - The revised authorised limits and operational boundary figures, as set out in this report are agreed.

7. Annual Governance Statement: 2018-19

Approval of the Annual Governance Statement for the 2018-19 financial year was sought from Members of the Finance & Audit Committee.

The review of the council's 2018-19 governance arrangements was conducted by the Corporate Performance Manager in accordance with the principles adopted by the council's

Code of Corporate Governance, itself a framework designed upon the guidance issued by CIPFA/SOLACE.

As part of the review, assurance of the effective operation of the council's governance arrangements has been sought from a number of sources such as the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Audit Executive, external auditors and the Local Government Ombudsmen etc. All source material, including the results of the review itself, have been itemised at appendix two of the report.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) reminded Members that all of the documents listed at Appendix 2 that supported the Annual Governance Statement had been published on the web library, which could be accessed via the website. A Member of the Committee Team emailed around the link a few weeks ago.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) directed Members attention to page 101 of the report where the Annual Governance Statement was provided and explained that it would be a good reference document for new Members to get a feel of the governance framework Gravesham operates under.

The review established that the authority had adequate governance arrangements in place. Whilst no significant issues were identified, the review did present some opportunities to further develop and strengthen the council's governance and internal control environment.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) further explained those opportunities (page 107) and their required actions:

- Constitution
 - Complete the next phase of the scheduled review of the council's Constitution and re-issue to all Members.
- Investors in People (IIP): Action Plan
 - To develop an effective action plan with which to build on the recommendations of the 2019 IIP assessment, ensuring the council develops an operational culture in line with industry good practice.
- Communications and Engagement Strategy
 - In developing a Communications and Engagement Strategy the council will aim to establish the principles that will guide how we communicate and engage, in language that people can understand, and through readily accessible channels.
- Corporate Plan: 2019-23
 - Develop a new Corporate Plan for the council using the research and principles identified from the Community Profile and Corporate Plan consultation exercise, alongside the key pledges and messages established in the administration's election manifesto.

Referencing Appendix 1 on page 98, concern was raised over the explanations and their clarity; the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised she would feed that back to the responsible officer.

Resolved that Members:

- Noted the findings of the review of the council's governance arrangements for 2018-19
- Approved and supported the Annual Governance Statement for the 2018-19 financial year

8. Audit Fee Letter 2019-20

The Committee was informed of the external audit fee set for 2019-20. The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) stated that the letter at appendix two provided details of the audit fee for the Council along with the scope and timing of the planned work of Grant Thornton UK LLP and details of the staff that were responsible for delivering the audit.

In July 2016 Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) was selected by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to take on the role of Appointing Person for principal local government and police bodies. After consideration by the Finance & Audit Committee Members, Full Council resolved unanimously to accept the invitation to opt into the appointing persons arrangements made by PSAA for the appointment of external auditors. Following a procurement process managed by PSAA, the council accepted the appointment of Grant Thornton (UK) LLP as the auditor of Gravesham Borough Council for five years from 1 April 2018.

The Council's scale fee for 2019/20 has been set by PSAA at £41,036 which is the same as in 2018/19 and is a 23% reduction of the fee that was paid in 2017/18; the procurement exercise managed by the PSAA is the main driver for the reduction in price.

Resolved that Members:

- Noted the external audit fee for 2019-20

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9:09pm.

Regulatory Board (Planning)**Wednesday, 12 June 2019****7.00 pm****Present:**

Cllr Lauren Sullivan (Chair)
Cllr Harold Craske (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
John Burden
Brian Francis
Gary Harding
Bob Lane
Jordan Meade
Brian Sangha

Note: Councillor: Sarah Gow was also in attendance

Jan Guylor	Head of Legal Services (Medway Council)
Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Christopher Butler	Planning Manager (Development Management)
Richard Hart	Principal Planner (Major Sites)
Peter Price	Principal Planner
Lauren Wallis	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

61. Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

62. To sign the Minutes of the previous meeting

Further to the Declaration of Interest in relation to application 20190155 made at the meeting of the Board held on 22 May 2019 by Cllr John Burden, Cllr Burden drew attention to the fact that whilst he was the Leader of the Council and that this was an a Borough Council application, he had not spoken or voted upon the item and therefore the minute should be amended to reflect this error.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2019, as amended, were signed by the Chair.

63. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Bob Lane declared an other interest in application 20190169 - Cobham Lodge, Valley Drive in that the application was immediately adjacent his ward and he had submitted an objection to the application as a private individual before his election to the Borough Council. He therefore considered his view to be predetermined and he advised of his intention not to take part in the discussion or voting on this application.

Cllr Jordan Meade declared an other interest in application 20190169 - Cobham Lodge, Valley Drive in he knew the speaker speaking in objection to the application when they had both been governors on the school board for Thamesview Secondary School.

Cllr John Burden declared a significant interest in application 20190265 – The Barn, East Court Farm, Church Lane, Chalk as the applicant was a personal friend and that he would leave the meeting during the discussion and voting on this application.

64. To consider whether any items in Part A of the Agenda should be considered in private or the items in Part B (if any) in Public

None.

65. Planning applications for determination by the Board

65.1 20190169 - Demolition of existing house and outbuildings and erection of a part four storey and part three storey building for the residential development of 20 no. one bedroom, 41 no. two bedroom and 3 no. three bedroom apartments with associated car parking - Cobham Lodge, Valley Drive - report herewith

Cllr Bob Lane remained in the Council Chamber but took no part in the discussions or voting on this application.

The Board considered an application reference 20190169 which proposed the demolition of the existing house and all outbuildings on the site and the construction of a part four storey and part three storey building for the residential development of 20 one bedroom, 41 two bedroom and 3 three bedroom apartments and associated car parking. The Principal Planner (Major Sites) set out the significant objections to the application relating to the siting, size, bulk, massing, design, impact on the street scene, adverse impact on the amenity of surrounding properties and the poor amenity for future occupiers. In addition, the proposal was failing to provide affordable housing or any S.106 contributions. As such the officer's report recommended that permission be refused and the report listed five grounds for refusal for Members' consideration. The application was before the Board as it was a major development proposal.

The following points were made during discussion on this application:

- Members noted that the reference to the overlooking of rear gardens at the rear, north side of the site was referring to a garden with no building within 5 metres of the boundary of the site which was in excess of the requirements of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy. However, residential gardens would be overlooked by the proposal including a four storey flank wall and Council policy required that amenity space be protected.
- The Board was advised that the apartments met the minimum size space standards. However, storage provision depended on the layout of the apartment. As the agent advised they wished the proposal to be considered as submitted negotiations had not taken place on the internal layout of the flats.
- Concern was raised that the proposal failed to provide affordable housing or any S.106 contributions. The Board was advised that the applicants had considered the

profit margin to be too low to include affordable housing or S.106 contributions and to do so would render the development unviable. Members considered that there should be affordable housing provided, if not on this development, then on another within the Borough.

- The Principal Planner (Major Sites) advised that the applicant had refused to negotiate with regard to concerns raised by officers and had asked that the application be considered by the Regulatory Board (Planning) as submitted.
- Following a question about whether the development had been designed with numbers of units in mind or for the people that might live there, Members were advised that a balcony had been included on every unit as amenity space together with the inclusion of appropriate play spaces rather than open grass areas. It had been proven that appropriate play spaces were used more regularly than open grass spaces. Careful planting had also been designed to improve amenity spaces and green roofs and walls had also been included in the design.
- Members noted that the elevations of the buildings shown in the PowerPoint presentation appeared squashed and would, in reality, appear taller and more vertical.
- Members were advised by the agent that this development would set a precedent for the Borough as a consequence of the Government's housing targets. This view was based on other available sites for development nearby including the lorry park and the Nell's café site. The construction of the Lower Thames Crossing would create a market for these residential developments.
- The Board noted that the 20% profit from developments was used as aspirational guidance in London Boroughs and other neighbouring authorities. However this aspiration was subject to market price drops the causes of which might include Brexit or a rise in taxes or inflation.
- The vehicle access was considered to be an awkward right turn from a busy road. However, Members were advised that officers had raised concerns but had been informed that there would not be enough vehicles turning right into the development per hour to qualify for a right turning lane layout to be introduced.
- Comments were made on the bulk, massing and density of the development and the lack of sympathy with the surrounding locale which was described as a leafy suburb.
- The Board was advised that a mix of materials was suggested including red brick and white render which was similar to nearby residences. Green and brown roofs were proposed. The green roofs would be planted with sedum and the brown would be spread with soil, stones and small rocks to allow local species of plants and flowers to seed themselves. The water collected from the roofs would be used for irrigation of the roofs and the wall planting. The walls would be covered in a series of pockets forming a vertical sheet. Hadlow College had undertaken research into this type of planting and flowering plants and higher density foliage would be used. This type of planting was able to remove particulates from the air. It was confirmed that the planting would need bi-annual maintenance.
- It was noted that some aspects of the design, the green/brown roofs and walls would be a good idea for use by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation in the Garden City.
- Members were informed that the perimeter trees of the site would be retained and additional trees would be planted in the open spaces.
- A Ward Member highlighted residents' concerns regarding the density of the development, the overlooking and loss of amenity, the proximity of the development to the road, the possible underestimation of the number of car owners that might reside in the development. It was considered that a smaller development would be more in keeping with the area.

- Members were advised that Government guidelines stated that local authorities required a 5 year housing supply. As GBC does not have one concern was raised by Members that GBC would lose planning appeals for proposals of this nature and would therefore lose the ability to apply planning conditions or influence the design of this type of development in the future.
- The Board noted that the proposed development did not lie within an Air Quality Management Area.

Resolved:

- (a) that application 20190169 be **DEFERRED** to enable negotiations with the applicant and/or the applicant's agent to address the Board's concerns in regard to all five grounds of refusal, as the Board considered a residential reuse of this site to be justifiable subject to revisions/amendments and additional information being agreed with officers and being formally submitted, with the instruction that the application be reported back to the Regulatory Board (Planning) on 4 September 2019 for Members to consider the revisions/amendments and additional information submitted, at that time. The concerns of the Regulatory Board (Planning) included that the proposed development fails to make any provision for affordable housing, or any other developer contributions and as such the proposal is contrary to Policy CS10 and CS16 of the Borough Council's adopted Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014) and National Planning Policy Framework; and
- (b) that should the applicant and/or applicant's agent decline to enter meaningful negotiations then the application be reported back to the Regulatory Board (Planning) on 4 September 2019 for Members to determine the application in line with the officer's original recommendation.

- Note:
- (a) Mr Darren Bland (Agent)(a supporter) addressed the Board.
 - (b) Mr David Gingell (an objector) addressed the Board.
 - (c) Cllr Sarah Gow spoke with the leave of the Chair.

65.2 20190265 - Removal of stable building and out building and replacement with an 8 bay domestic garage building with lift facility for the double stacking of vehicles at The Barn, East Court Farm, Church Lane, Gravesend - report herewith

Cllr John Burden left the Council Chamber during discussion and voting on this application.

The Board considered an application reference 20190265 which sought the removal of the stable building and an outbuilding and the replacement with an 8 bay domestic garage building with lift facility for the double stacking of vehicles. The Principal Planner described the application in detail and showed photographs and plans of the site. Members were also apprised of previous changes to the layout of the site which was a former farmstead, including the conversion of a brick barn and stable building into a dwelling (The Coach House), the demolition of a Dutch barn to create a garden, the conversion of a threshing barn into two dwellings (The Barn and The Granary) and the conversion of a side barn/cart lodge into a further dwelling (Meadow Lodge). The officer noted that the previous conversions had been undertaken using sympathetic designs. The site also has a new access to serve the four dwellings on the site. Permitted Development Rights had been removed on the conversion of the farm buildings to dwellings. However, the proposed

garage was much bigger than the building it replaced and had a larger footprint than the dwelling it would serve although its design was similar to that of the dwellings. The proposed garaging would be used to house the applicant's collection of cars which were currently stored around the site. The key issues were whether the proposal was inappropriate development contrary to national policy set out in Section 13 (Protecting Green Belt Land) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014), saved policy C13 (vii) of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review and emerging Policy DM6 – Extensions, Replacement Buildings and Ancillary Development in the Green belt on the Gravesham Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD (Regulation 18, Stage 1, Part 2 consultation draft – April 2018).

The Board was advised that garages did not fall within the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the NPPF. However there was some flexibility in local policies and the proposal should be considered on its merits, be reasonably required, be well designed, should not be overbearing and should be subservient to the main building, and not cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt and there should be no other outbuildings that could be used. No objections had been received for neighbouring properties and no objections had been received on highways grounds.

The application had been referred for consideration at the request of Cllr Brian Sangha.

The following points were made during discussion on this application:

- Following a question on whether to building to be removed was of historic interest, the officer advised that the stable building would be removed together with a green shipping container and had only been on the site since 2006. The two mobile homes being used by construction staff would also be removed. None of these could be considered as curtilage listed buildings.
- The Board was informed that the height of the tree line situated on Eastcourt Manor (not the application site) and located to the rear of the proposed garaging was currently approximately 7 to 8 metres and the garaging roofline would be 6.9 metres. The tree line behind the proposed building would screen the garage building from the neighbouring Eastcourt Manor.
- The site was located in the Chalk Ward of the Borough and was not within the parish area of Shorne which was 400 metres to the east.
- The proposal fell within the defined curtilage of the site.
- It was noted that the new access was built in 2013 and now blended into its surroundings as the planting had grown in.
- A comment was made that the Conservation Officer should have addressed the possible historic nature of the building to be removed and those within the curtilage.
- It was noted that there had been 4 garage spaces on site which in 2018 had been converted to residential properties and concern was expressed that this might happen again. The Board was advised that there was no intention for conversion into dwellings and the opinion was expressed that any permission should be strictly conditioned to prevent this from happening and that the limit for buildings within the curtilage of this site has been reached.
- It was considered that the proposal did not detract from the openness of the Green Belt. However, it was suggested that the meadow behind the dwellings should be protected and enhanced.
- Officers advised the Board that Very Special Circumstances needed to be demonstrated if an exception was to be made to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Following the Officer presentation to Members, the Board considered the submitted planning application and all other material planning considerations and information available to them. Members judged that the Very Special Circumstances were as follows:

- That the proposal was within the residential curtilage of the property and did not encroach onto the Green Belt;
- That the design and external treatment of the proposal reflected the existing buildings on the site;
- There were no usable buildings on the site for vehicle storage including the original open sided shed;
- The design of the proposal was considered to be subservient to the dwelling it was related to; and
- The proposal had a limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

Therefore the Board considered that the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, was clearly outweighed by the Very Special Circumstances listed above. In the light of these considerations, Members **resolved** that application 20190265 be **PERMITTED** subject to the conditions regarding the implementation of development listing drawing numbers, a condition limiting the use of the building to garaging ancillary to the main dwelling and for no other purpose and the use of appropriate materials; together with the reasons for imposing such conditions and informatives that will be described in full in the decision notice issued by the Planning Department and available on the following link: www.gravesham.gov.uk/planning-search.

Note: Mr Philip Graham (Agent)(a supporter) addressed the Board.

66. Planning applications determined under delegated powers by the Director (Housing & Regeneration)

A schedule showing applications determined by the Director (Housing & Regeneration) (under delegated powers) had been published on the Council's website.

67. Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

Mr Christopher Butler

It was noted that this was the last meeting of the Board that would be attended by Mr Christopher Butler – Planning Manager (Development Management) who would be leaving the Council to take up a post with the Planning Inspectorate. The Board thanked Mr Butler for all his hard work, help and excellent planning advice given throughout his time with the Council and wished him luck in his new role.

Mr Butler acknowledged the thanks of the Board.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.16 pm

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Overview Scrutiny Committee**Thursday, 13 June 2019****7.30 pm****Present:**

Cllr Jordan Meade (Chair)
 Cllr Steve Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
 Baljit Hayre
 Leslie Hills
 Elizabeth Mulheran
 Alan Ridgers
 Christina Rolles
 Peter Scollard

Note: Councillors: Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Lee Croxton (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Operational Services), Lenny Rolles (Cabinet Member for Commercial) and Leslie Hoskins were also in attendance.

Kevin Burbidge Director (Housing & Regeneration)
 Wale Adetoro Assistant Director (Housing)
 Chris Wakeford Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

109. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Ruth Martin; Cllr Baljit Hayre appeared as her substitute.

110. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 4 April 2019 were signed by the Chair.

111. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

112. Call in: Cabinet Item 7. Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy

The Chair explained that in calling in this item; he had no intention of criticising the strategy and the good work that had been done. The item had been called in to look at the following:

- To explore further how the implementation of the strategy will be managed.
- To understand the cost implications for the Council.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation period.
- To determine if the strategy will provide adequate scope for the borough to fulfil its duty to protect Gravesham's most vulnerable.

The Director (Housing and Regeneration) presented the Committee with the council's draft homelessness and rough sleeping prevention strategy, which has been circulated widely for consultation with stakeholders. The aim of this strategy is to set out the Council's approach for tackling homelessness in the district and how, over the lifetime of this strategy, the council will achieve this working with key partners.

The Director (Housing and Regeneration) drew Members attention to Appendix 2: *Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2019 – 2024* and Appendix 3: *Action plan for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019 – 2024*.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) highlighted the following areas:

- Following a motion at Annual Council on 6 March 2018 a cross-party working group was established to tackle homelessness in the Borough.
- The cross-party working group met around twenty outside agencies who deal with homelessness and all had a great input into the homelessness strategy.
- Sanctuary have gone for charity registration and are now 'Gravesham Sanctuary'.
- The communal room linked to the Council owned sheltered accommodation at Longferry Court is now going to be used by Gravesham Sanctuary.
- £1,700 worth of equipment is being donated for kitchen and shower facilities
- Gravesham Sanctuary can be the spearhead to show the Council as a leading light in Local Authorities for helping homeless people.
- House of Mercy have launched a fourth house this week in Pelham Road with 13 rooms. Since 2004 the House of Mercy have helped over 500 homeless people.

Following questions from the Committee, the Director (Housing and Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Housing) highlighted the following:

- The Gravesham Homelessness strategy does sit alongside our neighbouring Boroughs strategies. All authorities have a strategy that has to be aligned with the Homelessness Reduction Act, etc.
- The format of the Strategy will be tidied up and made more concise
- Budgets have been increased in recent years in order to comply with the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Council also went through a bidding process and successfully secured £150,000 for rough sleeping initiatives in 2019/20.
- The Council has alerted outside agencies to the Public Health England fund that is available for mental health issues.
- Homelessness was identified as a 'red' issue in the Audit and Counter Fraud report because of the delay in bringing forward the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy. The four audit recommendations are being dealt with and will therefore no longer be 'red'.
- The action plan at Appendix 3 mentions there is an intention to create a local 'lettings agency' where GBC will work with local landlords who are willing to let GBC manage their properties. GBC are looking at several partners but are currently working closely with Medway on this matter.

The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to amend the wording to replace 'lettings agency' with 'hub' or other suitable term.

- The 'front door and IT access' refers to the housing advice desk in the reception area of the Civic Centre and providing the privacy that people need.
- GBC will not be using standard templates for people's personalised plans. The template is just a guide.
- The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to invite all partner organisations to provide a briefing on their work to all GBC Members.
- The impact of the strategy will be monitored via reports to the Housing Committee.
- The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to move the competition date for a full health needs audit using the Homeless Link Tool forward to October 2019
- The format of recording Homelessness has changed and accurate statistics are currently quite hard to find in order to compare GBC to neighbouring Boroughs
- GBC are considering how to manage a media launch for the strategy and Gravesham Sanctuary.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) explained that she would be willing to seek cross-party support moving forward to tackle homelessness and she would liaise with the Director (Housing and Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Housing) to discuss how to formalise this approach.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) explained that she would be willing to revisit the wording on the 'Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Housing/Leader' and amend / remove the words 'exciting time'.

Resolved that the Overview Scrutiny Committee note the Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy and the Cabinet decision and request that Cabinet reflect upon the above-mentioned comments of the Committee.

113. Scrutiny Review Programme - Future work plan

The Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny) invited Members of the Committee to consider what topics they would like to put forward to be reviewed.

Councillor Leslie Hills suggested the following topic:

- **Access to Health Services in Gravesham**
 - Concern about closure of surgeries
 - Increasingly difficult to get an appointment with a GP
 - Could compare the previous Scrutiny review on this matter in 2014 with current day findings.
 - Development of medical hubs is leading to a decline of the 'family GP'
 - Kent Sustainability and transformation plan; build medical hubs and have 7 day medical provision – this will reduce the GP facility and may lead to more closures.
 - Examine Integration of primary care services with hospital care and after care.
 - Concern about 'bed blocking'
 - Concern about proposed closure of the walk in centre in Gravesham
 - Concern about increase in local population and strain on medical facilities
 - Doctors complete training in UK then decide to work in other countries – there's a retention issue
 - GP's retiring early due to work pressures.

- Urgent cancer referrals: national targets not being met.
- Concern about declining social care after treatment.

Councillor Conrad Broadley suggested topics:

- **Review of Planning Conservation Guidance**
 - Conservation area action plans – are they still fit for purpose?
- **Review of Open Spaces/ village greens and GBC's guidance / policies in this area.**
 - Is the guidance fit for purpose?
- **Review of GBC's Maritime Strategy**
 - Huge stretch of Gravesham border is on the river – do we have a strategy for; the Sea Cadets? Cruise liner?
 - Is there a strategy for what should go on the river front?

Councillor Steve Thompson suggested topics:

- **Review of the Town Centre / Asset based regeneration of the High Street**
 - What can GBC do to improve the lot for businesses in the town?
 - Look at empty / underused premises
 - Consult stakeholders, KCC, Gravesham MP, conduct survey of failed businesses.
 - Outcome: an improved High Street environment.
- **Review of Fly-tipping / Littering in the Borough**
 - Major problem in Borough / County / Country
 - Review current working practices
 - Look at best practice benchmarking / other Boroughs
 - Outcome: cleaner Borough and community collaboration

Resolved that the Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed that the topic review suggestions will be more thoroughly explored outside of the meeting, and discussed with the Chair, prior to coming back to a future meeting of Scrutiny for agreement with the Committee.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Appointments to Outside Body (Elizabeth Huggins' Cottages Charity)

The Elizabeth Huggins' Cottages Charity has asked the Council to consider the following appointments:-

- (1) Colin Caller to be appointed as a family trustee; and
- (2) Karen Hurdle to replace Brian Newell as a representative trustee for the remainder of his term.

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