

Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 12 July 2018

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)

Cllr Conrad Broadley (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Lee Croxton
 Gary Harding
 Sara Langdale
 Makhan Singh
 Jenny Wallace
 Michael Wenban

Michelle Batstone Corporate Change Manager
Andrew Barnett Principal Accountant
Chris Wakeford Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

72. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Leslie Hills; Councillor Gary Harding appeared as his substitute. An apology for absence was also received from Cllr William Lambert.

73. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 14 June 2018 were signed by the Chair.

74. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

75. Service Review Options - Monitoring Report

The Corporate Change Manager and Principal Accountant provided Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee with a 6 month update against the options approved by Members in respect of the Service Review Process.

The Corporate Change Manager gave details of the Council's progress on achieving £2.9m of savings. Members of the Cabinet approved a number of options put forward by officers from the eight service reviews completed; amounting to £1.46m.

Overall there is a further £400,000 to be delivered

The Committee went through Appendix Two 'Service Review Options – Progress against agreed options – June 2018' and raised the following points:

Economic Development and Town Centre Management

1. Towncentric

Members of the Committee felt that, although this option had been labelled as 'completed', the savings target (£66,000) had not actually been achieved.

Following a question from the Committee, the Principal Accountant advised that the figures reported when the option was agreed were estimates and that when finalised; the actual savings were slightly lower than had been estimated.

2. Gravesend Borough Market

Members of the Committee requested more detail about the current tourism offer at the pop-up stall in the Market, including the following:

- The level of usage of the pop-up stand, in particular compared to level of previous usage at Towncentric.
- Further detail on how successful the new tourism offering has been since its inception
- Further analysis on what the pop-up stall is being used for by the public, what is the most popular area of enquiry.

3. Gatekeepers

Members of the Committee did not feel that the savings figure reported (£41,000) represented a true saving because GBC are using casual staff to fill the Gatekeeper posts that had been ceased. Members felt that reporting a saving against this when a permanent solution to the Gatekeeper issue had not been put in place was not a true representation of the savings achieved.

The Committee felt that the savings should be removed from the report in future (and the Medium Term Financial Plan), until such a time when the issue is resolved and there is either no expenditure on casual staff or a permanent solution has been implemented and costed.

Members sought clarity/further information on the following:

- The role of the casual staff employed in the Gatekeeper role in comparison to the role of the previous officers in post.
- Details of the number of casual staff that GBC employ for this role and whether they are involved in any other activities / duties.
- Further detail on the differences between employing casual staff and permanent employees (contractual arrangements etc.)
- Further detail on the 'real' saving in this area; i.e. what is the actual value of the saving once the costs associated with the casual staff are taken into account.
- More information about the alternative options to the Gatekeepers that have been considered / rejected and those that are still under consideration, including:

- Rising bollards
- Installation of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)
- Discussions with the bus company regarding re-routing of buses
- Discussions with the bus company regarding subsidising the Gatekeeper costs

Members also felt that, whatever solution is put in place, access for emergency vehicles is essential.

Public Health & Communities

1. Fireworks

Members questioned whether this was a true saving/income initiative as the council has simply used savings from another area (Neighbourhood Forum budget) to continue delivering the firework displays. Therefore; reporting a £15,000 saving is not accurate. Members suggested that the saving was more likely to be £7,000 i.e. £22,000 from the Neighbourhood Forum budget, minus the £15,000 still paid out for fireworks.

Members requested clarification on how the decision was made to use the Neighbourhood Forum saving to fund the fireworks, despite their understanding that Cabinet had agreed to stop them if the Kent Fire & Rescue Service were not willing to fund them.

Parking & Amenities

1. Community Toilet Scheme

Members questioned whether Meopham and Cobham Parish Council would actually take over the management of their respective toilets.

The Corporate Change Manager confirmed that the Parish Councils are in favour of taking over the management of the toilets and the Council's legal team are progressing this matter.

The Committee requested further clarification on the following:

- Will the Parish Council's be responsible for the payment of business rates for the toilets?
- Further detail on the plans for the toilet sites that have been closed / sold.

Direct Services Organisation (DSO)

1. Green Waste Scheme

Following a Member question, the Principal Accountant clarified that income generated for the scheme (£90,000) was a net income figure. Following further discussion, the Principal Accountant also confirmed that this was the standard approach when analysing cost reductions or income growths and that all figures in the report represented the net impact on the Council's MTFP.

Members commended the scheme and requested that all officers involved are congratulated for their hard work.

The Committee respectfully requested that the following areas be taken into account for all future monitoring reports:

- Ensure that the narrative provided by officers is comprehensive and provides the full history of actions that have been taken in relation to the option.
- Ensure the financial information provides a true reflection of actual savings/income generated through the chosen option.
- If a saving has not been achieved but an alternative saving/income stream has been identified; ensure that these are reported separately rather than using one to offset the other.

The Chair raised a point about Shared Services and requested that officer's report back on how these are monitored and managed after inception, including commentary on Member involvement via working groups.

The Corporate Change Manager and the Principal Accountant agreed to take back all the comments and questions detailed above to the relevant officers and provide the Committee with a collated response.

Resolved that the Committee note the report and request that their comments and questions are fed back to the appropriate officers so a response can be collated and circulated to the Committee.

76. Scrutiny Reviews - Oral Update

The Chair confirmed the Membership of the two new Scrutiny Review sub-groups as detailed below:

Scrutiny Review of Grass Cutting and Horticulture

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Lyn Milner
Cllr Makhan Singh
Cllr Gary Harding
Cllr Leslie Hills
Cllr Sara Langdale

Scrutiny Review of Council Controlled Property Companies and Directorships

Cllr Conrad Broadley (Chair)
Cllr Leslie Hills
Cllr Karen Hurdle
Cllr John Burden
Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox
Cllr Jenny Wallace

Members were advised that works have commenced on identifying the right officers to support each of the topic reviews and on the preparation of the draft terms of reference for each review, with a view to officially starting in September 2018.

The Chair requested that the draft terms of reference for each review are sent to both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for approval.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress made with the two Scrutiny Reviews.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm