



## Overview Scrutiny Committee

Members of the **Overview Scrutiny Committee** of **Gravesham Borough Council** are summoned to attend a meeting to be held Virtually on **Thursday, 1 April 2021 at 7.30 pm** when the business specified in the following agenda is proposed to be transacted. Details on how Members can attend the meeting will be sent separately.

In response to COVID-19, the Government has legislated to permit remote attendance by Elected Members at formal meetings. This is conditional on other Elected Members and the public being able to hear those participating in the meeting. This meeting will be streamed live and can be watched via Gravesham Borough Council's YouTube Channel:-

[www.youtube.com/graveshamtv](http://www.youtube.com/graveshamtv)

S Walsh  
Service Manager (Communities)

### Agenda

#### Part A

#### Items likely to be considered in Public

1. Apologies
2. Minutes (Pages 3 - 6)
3. Declarations of Interest
4. To consider whether any items in Part A will be considered in private or any items in Part B in public
5. Call ins  
Items called in from the Cabinet meeting of 22 March 2021  
  
(Please ensure you have access to the Cabinet agenda for 22 March 2021 previously circulated to Members).
6. Response to Member Survey - December 2020 (Pages 7 - 14)

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

8. Private Items

To move, if required, that pursuant to section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded from any items included in Part B of the agenda because it is likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that if members of the public are present during those items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

**Part B**

**Items likely to be considered in private**

9. Call ins

Items called in from the Cabinet meeting of 22 March 2021

(Please ensure you have access to the Cabinet agenda for 22 March 2021 previously circulated to Members).

**Members**

Cllr Jordan Meade (Chair)

Cllr Steve Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley  
Leslie Hills  
Emma Morley  
Elizabeth Mulheran  
Alan Ridgers  
Christina Rolles  
Peter Scollard

Substitutes: To be notified

**Overview Scrutiny Committee****Thursday, 11 February 2021****7.30 pm****Present:**

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

Councillors: Conrad Broadley  
Leslie Hills  
Emma Morley  
Elizabeth Mulheran  
Peter Scollard  
Gurjit Kaur Bains  
Brian Francis

Sarah Parfitt Director (Corporate Services)  
Lisa Nyon Assistant Director (Corporate Services)  
Chris Wakeford Committee Services Manager  
Clive Boorman Technical Services support Officer

**26. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Alan Ridgers and Cllr Christina Rolles; Cllr Gurjit Bains and Cllr Brian Francis attended as their respective substitutes.

**27. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Committee held on 19 November 2020 were signed by the Chair.

**28. Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations of Interest were made.

**29. General Fund Budget Setting 2021/22**

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) presented the Committee with the draft budget and proposals for 2021/22. The report contained the General Fund Revenue and Capital Estimates for 2021/22, as well as the revised estimates for 2020/21 and longer term budget projections, as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised that the pandemic had created new challenges for the future sustainability of the Council, which had been compounded by the ongoing and prolonged uncertainty around the future funding of local government. Members were advised that the format of the budget report included a covering summary report which outlined the budget setting context and proposals with a series of appendices providing the detail.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) highlighted the following points:

- Appendix 2 - The budget had been prepared on the basis of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 17<sup>th</sup> December.
- Similarly to last year, this was a one year only settlement pending the outcome of the Spending Review and Fair Funding Review.
- There had been a number of cuts to local government funding over the last 10 years and attention was drawn to the table under point 3 of Appendix 2 showing that there has been no increase in the business rates baseline this year. However, there was a continuation from last year of Government eliminating 'negative Revenue Support Grant' for Gravesham and this was budgeted to be £244k. In addition, the provisional settlement had introduced a new Lower Tier Services Grant intended to ensure that no lower tier council had a decrease in spending power. For Gravesham, the provisional settlement indicated that this grant would be £126,260.
- The graph in point 11 of the report showed the assumed increase in Core Spending power for 2021/22 of 1.4% This assumed a rise in Council Tax receipts which had been reflected by the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- The Council had secured indicative New Homes Bonus funding for 2021/22 of £311,050. This was below the level of funding that was previously in the Medium Term Financial Plan due to there being only 55 net additions to the housing stock of the Borough due to the pandemic, less than the 167 net additional homes needed to be delivered to meet the 0.4% national baseline.
- This had resulted in an increase of Core Spending power per dwelling in the Borough of c.2% or £252. This is the sixth lowest in Kent.
- With regards to Business Rates for 2021/22 Gravesham would continue to be part of the Kent pool.
- The current Medium Term Financial Strategy covered the period to 31 March 2021 and in the absence of any certainty from the Government on local government funding, it had been decided that the Council would produce another one year Medium Term Financial Strategy, effectively a holding statement, until the outcomes of the Spending Review, Fair Funding Review and Business Rates reforms were known.
- In relation to the Council Tax charge - the Provisional Finance Settlement announcement had indicated the continued flexibility for district councils in setting Council Tax levels by permitting district councils to raise Council Tax by 2% or up to and including £5 (whichever was higher) without triggering the requirement for a referendum. Therefore, the budget had been prepared on the basis of a £4.95 or (2.3%) increase, taking the Council's element of the charge from the current level of £208.08 to £213.03.
- It was proposed that working balances remain at £5.25m, this comprised of minimum working balances of £2m and General Reserve of £3.25m.
- The draft Capital Programme for 2021/22 was expected to cost £52.3m. The main items being works for the St Georges Shopping Centre of £5m, Elizabeth Huggins Cottages £2m and The Charter £27m.

The Director (Corporate Services) confirmed that she was confident about the budget proposals which once again had been built in the face of a lack of longer-term funding arrangements plus ten years of sustained cuts and the effects of the pandemic. However, she noted that whilst it had been difficult the Council was still in a strong position because of work undertaken previously and the budget continued to deliver the Council's objectives and support local employment opportunities. However, the impact of Covid had resulted in a budget gap of £2.6m emerging in 2025/26 in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Director (Corporate Services) and the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- The draft budget and proposals for 2021/22 is proactively brought to the Overview Scrutiny Committee to ensure transparency and enable members to ask questions.
- Employee costs have increased; mainly due to the salary increase for those who earn £24,000 and below and the Kickstart scheme that helps young people get back into work and develops skills. The Kickstart Scheme is fully funded by government and this will offset the expenses.
- A number of budget lines have additional expenditure and it is expected that grants will help to offset this.
- The Director (Corporate Services) will provide the Committee with further detail of the £1million movement in salaries outside of the meeting.
- The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) will provide the Committee with further detail on the running expenses, outside of the meeting.
- Policy announcements by Central Government about longer term funding for local government will influence when the MTFs can move from a one year plan to a longer term plan. These announcements could take effect from 2022, but may not happen before 2023.
- The Council received £1.8million to help us meet additional expenditure pressures from Covid-19. There are some direct costs to the council from Covid but we cannot underestimate the Council staff time in delivering a local response e.g. community support, delivering food, delivering medicines, grants for businesses, test and trace payments etc. as well as continuing to deliver essential council services. The funding is welcome but hasn't fully reflected the resources the Council has put into the response at the detriment of other services or projects being progressed.
- A lot of officer time is being spent on the vast number of returns submitted to the Government.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the General Fund Budget Setting 2021/22 report and appendices.

### **30. Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting 2021/22**

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) presented the Committee with the draft revenue and capital estimates for the Housing Revenue Account in 2021/22 and the following key points were highlighted:

- An income of 28m and expenditure of £29m.
- As per the Spending Review announcements on public sector pay in November, the budget reflected no inflationary increase for 2021/22 with the exception of those earning less than £24k per annum who would receive a pay increase of at least £250.
- A budget of £200k had been provided to support a planned review and restructure of housing services.
- Service charges had increased to a level capped at CPI +1 (1.5%) bringing the average service charge to £3.72.
- The Council would continue with the Housing Capital Programme set out in 2020-21 which had been severely impacted by the pandemic. The programme for the year

was estimated at £20.8m with the focus being to maintain current housing stock and deliver on the new build and acquisitions programme.

The Director (Corporate Services) and the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- The Director (Corporate Services) will check the percentage increase is correct on page 244, point 28.
- The Director (Corporate Services) will check if Arnold Avenue should be included in the New Build and Acquisitions Programme on page 271, point 5.
- Interim housing for the homeless – where we are unable to house persons requiring temporary accommodation, Bed and Breakfast (B&B) is one option but is not really suitable. The Council anticipates a reduced level of requirement for temporary accommodation which be used to offset the costs of the premises moving forward, alongside Housing Benefit.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting 2021/22 report and appendices.

### **31. Maritime Strategy Review - Oral update**

The Chair provided the following update:

- Ten evidence gathering sessions have been held
- The Sub-Group have developed twenty-three recommendations.
- A draft report is being prepared for consideration by the Committee at its next meeting on 4 March 2021

The Chair thanked Chris Wakeford, Committee Services Manager and the IT / Digital Teams for their work in supporting the review.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8.16 pm

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

### **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Overview Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 01 April 2021

**Reporting officer:** Darren Everden, Assistant Director (IT & Transformation) and Michelle Batstone, Corporate Change Manager

**Subject:** Recent Member Survey – Responses

#### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To provide the Overview Scrutiny Committee with the findings from the recent Member Survey, specifically in relation to technology and future Member requirements, for consideration.

#### **Recommendations:**

Member are asked to review the findings sets out in this report and subsequent appendix and provide thoughts and/or comments for further consideration.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In December 2020, a Member survey was undertaken. The main purpose of the survey was to explore the ways in which Members engage with their constituents in order to inform the council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission, relating to council size.
- 1.2 In addition, the survey also sought to identify the technological support that is currently in place for Members, any areas of concern and any areas where further support is required by Members. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the areas identified by Members for further review, and the approach the council is taking to address this.
- 1.3 In total 25 Members responded to the survey, a response rate of 58.14%.

## **2. Member Survey Findings**

- 2.1 Specifically in relation to technology, there were a number of areas of concern/consideration raised by Members through the survey covering the following areas:
  - 2.1.1 The rollout of Microsoft 365 and associated training for Members to support them in the use of the new software.

- 2.1.2 Improvements to hardware provided to Members – consideration of changes to the actual devices used by Members along with additional hardware, such as monitors, to support Members in their activities.
  - 2.1.3 E-mails – concerns regarding the reliability of the e-mail server and the potential for re-directing e-mails if possible.
  - 2.1.4 Additional training for Members to support the use of virtual meetings to engage with constituents.
  - 2.1.5 Training for Members on the safe use of social media. This would include exploring options with Members to enable them to undertake surveys with their constituents through social media and other mechanisms as required.
  - 2.1.6 Consideration of a specific case management system to enable Members to manage their constituency casework.
  - 2.1.7 Undertaking a review of the council's website to ensure it is user friendly and easy to navigate.
- 2.2 Appendix two provides a detailed response from officers regarding each of the areas raised, along with identification of specific actions where necessary.

### **3. Background papers**

- 3.1 Background papers pertaining to this report are held by the Corporate Change Manager. Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.



IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	There are no legal implications resulting from this report.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	There are no finance or value for money implications resulting from this report.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	There is a need to ensure that members are able to engage with their constituents effectively. The risk for Members is, that without the appropriate technology and training in place to support their roles, they will not be able to effectively represent and respond to their constituents.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>?</p> <p>Whilst there are no specific data protection or GDPR consideration directly linked to this report, data security will be considered as part of any new systems, technology or processes that are implemented for Members use, particularly in relation to the use of constituent data.</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	Supporting Members' in their constituency role, whilst not a specific corporate objective, is critical in ensuring the council and its Members are able to effectively engage with the residents in the borough.
<b>Climate Change</b>	The ability for Members to undertake their duties remotely, either through attending virtual council meetings or by engaging with their constituents virtually, will have a positive impact on Climate Change through the reduced use of paper and reduced travel mile.

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>APPENDIX 1</b>
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	The survey responses from Members identified a concern regarding the council's website. This has been addressed in the appendix to the report.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adult's implications resulting from this report.

**Response to Member Questions/Suggestions:**

	<b>Issue/Concern Raised</b>	<b>GBC response</b>
1.	Implementation of Microsoft 365 including specific training for Members on its use.	The rollout of Microsoft 365 will continue over the coming months and arrangements will be made with Members on their individual migrations. As part of the process, training will be arranged at a suitable time.
2.	Provision of improved hardware – iPads are very restrictive. Consideration of a change from iPads to windows based platforms and devices to enable IT to access devices remotely to resolve issues but also provide greater range of packages (Word, Excel etc.). Consideration of Laptops/Surface Pro (or similar device).	The original intention of providing iPads for Members and Officers was to replace printed report papers with the electronic equivalent in the Modern.Gov app while at in person committee meetings. With the transition to online meetings as a result of the pandemic the demands placed on the equipment are significantly different to what was originally intended. Keeping open a video conference application at the same time as reading reports in modern.gov is difficult on a small screen. Furthermore, limitations in iPadOS (for privacy) limits the use of the camera to foreground applications only, so any member connected to the meeting but reading papers on modern.gov cannot be seen by attendees.  An assessment will be made on the suitability and financial impact of alternative hardware.
3.	Provision of improved hardware – additional monitors/screens to assist virtual meetings, headset, keyboards, etc. Providing ability to see the agenda and meeting on separate screens.	An assessment will be made on the benefits of additional hardware along with the financial impact.
4.	Concerns regarding the reliability of the e-mail server. A number of Members have commented about lack access to e-mails creating a backlog and raising concerns about missed casework	The core email server has not suffered any downtime for a considerable period of time, but reports from Members with e-mail problems have usually been related to local issues with the SecureMail iPad app. Once Members are moved to M365 the Outlook app will be used instead of SecureMail and will hopefully improve reliability.

	Issue/Concern Raised	GBC response
5.	Redirection of council e-mails to personal e-mail accounts or access to e-mails on personal devices.	<p>There are a number of legal and data protection issues with council e-mail being forwarded to personal e-mail accounts. Co-mingling of personal and council e-mail brings personal e-mail accounts in scope for Freedom of Information searches, puts council data at risk of unauthorised access on external e-mail systems for which the council does not have a legally enforceable contract, and could result in accidental breaches due to human error (confusion because council and personal e-mail is in the same place).</p> <p>Access to Microsoft 365 e-mail from personal devices will be preferred rather than forwarding to personal accounts.</p>
6.	Provision of remote access to council systems, including Modern.gov is lacking. Implementing a VPN access to GBC Servers for Members.	Remote access to Modern.Gov via the Pulse Secure VPN is already possible. Training on how to access this can be built into the members training programme for IT. There is also a Windows 10 version of the Modern.Gov app which can be used to access papers from a windows device which doesn't require VPN access.
7.	Virtual Meetings – additional training to support Members outside of committee meetings to enable them to set up their own virtual meetings within their constituency.	Training on M365 including how to set up virtual meetings will be arranged.
8.	<p>Social media – exploring ways in which social media can be used at a 'macro' level to keep constituents informed on area specific issues but also to enable them to raise concerns.</p> <p>Training to be provided to Members on the safe use of Social media.</p>	<p>It is possible to target social media at specific areas, but only on Facebook. The facility is not currently available via Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn, for example.</p> <p>Budget would also be required - not a substantial one, but to target specific geographical areas is a charged service on Facebook.</p> <p>It is simple to do. During the autumn when there were concerns over the rate of increase of Covid cases in a specific ward, we identified a road in the middle of that ward and targeted Facebook messages at users whose address was given as within 1 mile of that road. The user can specify the radius they would like the messaging to reach and the charge varies depending on distance specified.</p> <p>The process for this can be included in training for Members on the safe use of social media, which the Communications Team will be happy to facilitate.</p>

	<b>Issue/Concern Raised</b>	<b>GBC response</b>
9.	Assistance to be provided to enable Members to collect resident feedback in a more straightforward way i.e. through use of surveys etc.	There are a number of easy to use and simple survey platforms available online. The Communications Team would be happy to work with Members on formulating survey questions, setting up surveys and promoting them via social media.
10.	Exploration of a confidential case management system to assist Members in managing their caseload	<p>The imminent introduction of Microsoft 365 (365), and the Teams package that sits alongside this, will provide an opportunity to review integrated case management functionality to members. As 365 and Teams will provide new tools that will be of great use to Members it is also expected to take a few months for Members to fully utilise the product and understand how it can be used.</p> <p>It is suggest that once 365 and Teams is embedded further investigatory work is undertaken on the software on the market, which integrates within the Teams environment to evaluate the costs and benefits.</p>
11.	Review of the council website is required – a number of constituents have raised issues about the ease of finding information on the council website.	<p>The corporate website is under continuous review by the Digital Team working with our colleagues within service departments. We have mechanisms in place on every page of the website and on all our online forms to ensure residents, visitors and businesses have a way of providing their feedback.</p> <p>In January 2021, 1,268 pieces of customer feedback were received about our online services, 90% of those rated our services 4-5* out of 5. Regular website content reviews are completed to ensure our content is fit for purpose, easy to find, navigate and accessible. The council's website is currently ranked No1 out of all UK local authorities for having the most accessible website in the country, demonstrating our continued commitment to accessibility for all.</p> <p>If Members do receive any website feedback from constituents the Digital Team would be grateful if they're passed via email to <a href="mailto:digital.team@gravesham.gov.uk">digital.team@gravesham.gov.uk</a>. All feedback will be reviewed and a reply will be provided.</p>

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