

Cabinet

Tuesday, 30 May 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Lauren Sullivan
Narinderjit Singh Thandi
Jenny Wallace

Note: Councillors Jo Hart, Baljit Hayre, Jordan Meade, Alan Metcalf, Karina O'Malley, Lenny Rolles and Alison Williams were also in attendance.

Nick Brown	Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities)
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Victoria May	Service Manager (Housing Options)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

The Leader welcomed Members and Officers to the first meeting of the Cabinet following the Borough Elections. The Leader advised that the Cabinet would comprise of six Members and that Cllr Lenny Rolles would be undertaking a non-Cabinet position and would be chairing the 'Special Cabinet Advisory Committee'.

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Emma Morley.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 20 March 2023 were signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

5. Formation of a Social Lettings Agency (SLA)

The Cabinet was presented with a report which provided an overview of the rationale to create a not-for-profit Social Letting Agency (SLA) in Gravesham which will require the employment of a Letting's Manager to lead the project and deliver the agency.

The Cabinet was informed that, emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council had been facing an ever-increasing issue in that there were simply not enough suitable properties to house those who were homeless and in need, resulting in them being placed into temporary accommodation. Due to challenges in accessing the private rented sector locally, the reliance for the provision of temporary accommodation was currently by nightly paid providers, which was the most expensive form of temporary accommodation.

The Council currently had its highest number of households in temporary accommodation which was causing considerable financial instability for the service. The expenditure for emergency accommodation for 2022/23 was £1,885,410, against a budget of £316,950 which included the Homeless Prevention Grant.

To help lessen the burden on nightly paid and expensive accommodation and provide affordable housing options for those who were likely to experience homelessness, Gravesham needed to access the private rented sector market, and can do so by creating an SLA.

This will enable Gravesham to actively engage with Landlords in the Borough who will be happy to house those on low income and provide a valuable homeless prevention tool. The homes identified as suitable for the SLA will be used to target households in temporary accommodation so that they can reduce the number of placements and offer a reduced expenditure. It will offer Landlords an option that protects them from the current perceived volatility in the rental market and cost of living issues. The model will be to:-

- Offer a guaranteed rent to a Landlord, reducing the risk to the Landlord of working with the perceived 'higher risk' tenant; and
- Provision of a management service, at a low cost or free, which will be negotiable. This has a tangible cost benefit to a Landlord who will be expected to pay a higher % fee to a High Street Agent.

By offering guaranteed rent and a low or 0% management fee, the rent offered to a Landlord by an SLA can be reduced, closing the gap between the market rent and the local housing allowance rates as detailed within the report. For the Landlord, this will provide a cost benefit, and they will also have no void or rent arrear costs, meaning the SLA should be able to negotiate a lower agreed monthly rent.

The SLA will not be directly responsible for repairs however its role will be to organise these and the recommended first contractor will be Gravesham's established repairs service, Rosherville.

The report demonstrated the need for an SLA and how it could enter the market. In the first year, two existing full-time equivalents would be used from the landlord liaison team to support the work. However, there would be a need to recruit a Letting's Manager to lead the project and deliver the agency. There would also be a need to invest in a property management software system. Using advice of those who successfully operate in this environment, various products had been demonstrated and SME Professional had been identified as the most fit for purpose, streamlined and cost effective system.

It was anticipated that in year one, 20 households will come out of nightly paid units to go into private sector homes. This will save money to the Council and as more Landlords come on board this will again show a saving on temporary accommodation budgets despite there being an upward trend on placements.

The service will consider Landlords with portfolios for the first 20 homes and therefore the aim will be to source no more than 5 Landlords who were based in the United Kingdom. The Cabinet was informed that a Landlord had already reached out to the Council with the hope to provide 7 units for the SLA and the Service Manager (Housing Options) was also in negotiations with a local estate agent who wants to work with the Council to ensure that the SLA is a success. If Gravesham was to secure 20 mixed units, there is evidence that the SLA would save money over time as demonstrated within the report.

By creating an SLA this would allow Gravesham to build on their reputation, be innovative and also reduce temporary accommodation costs for 20 household in year 1. There are very few other local authorities taking this approach however A Better Choice Social Lettings Agency has been running within Ashford Borough Council for over 10 years successfully.

The Cabinet considered the report and welcomed the creation of an SLA in Gravesham. The Cabinet stated that it was key for the Council to publicise and explain to Landlords the benefits of being part of the SLA. It was also felt that those properties let via the SLA would be of a good standard for tenants.

Resolved that:-

1. the proposal to create a not-for-profit Social Lettings Agency and initial investment be approved; and
2. the creation of a full time Lettings Manager to progress the project, establish and manage the agency be approved.

6. Parking Enforcement Policy March 2023

The Cabinet was provided with a revision of the 2019 Parking Enforcement Policy.

In 2019, following a Local Government Ombudsman recommendation, Gravesham's first Parking Enforcement Policy was published.

The Policy sets out how the Council enforces both on and off-street parking contraventions and the subsequent administration processes. It also sets out the legislative requirements of civil parking enforcement.

The Policy revision period is three years. Therefore, the Policy had been reviewed and updated. It now incorporated technological changes to the parking service such as virtual parking permits and Automatic Number Plate Recognition/Barrier car park payment systems. It also highlights legislative changes since 2019.

The Cabinet considered the Policy and requested that the 'Clamping and Removing' section be strengthened to allow for the prompt removal of vehicles where allowable by law.

Resolved that the Parking Enforcement Policy 2023 be implemented and published.

7. Appointment of Climate Change Advisory Board

Resolved that the following Members be appointed to the Climate Change Advisory Board:-

Labour Group (4 seats)

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox
Cllr Deborah Croxton
Cllr Ektaveen Thandi

Conservative Group (1 seat)

Cllr Dakota Dibben

8. Appointment of Rosherville Shareholder Advisory Board

Resolved that the following Members be appointed to the Rosherville Shareholder Advisory Board:-

Labour Group (3 seats)

Cllr Lenny Rolles (Chair)
Cllr Alison Williams (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Ektaveen Thandi

Conservative Group (2 seats)

Cllr Samir Jassal
Cllr Benjamin Sizer

9. Minutes of meeting of Climate Change Advisory Board

The Cabinet noted the minutes of the Climate Change Advisory Board held on 3 April 2023.

The Leader advised that the Cabinet would be undertaking Carbon Literacy Training and invited the Leader of the Opposition to put forward Members of the Conservative Group who may wish to also take part in the training.

10. Exclusion

Resolved that 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 the item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

11. Review of the Rosherville Remuneration Policy

The Cabinet's approval was sought for the draft Remuneration Policy for the Rosherville group of companies, following the annual review process.

Resolved that:-

1. the revised Remuneration Policy for Rosherville Limited be approved by the Shareholder; and
2. the annual updates to the salary information within the policy be updated as necessary to ensure it is reflective of the annual pay awards approved by the Shareholder. This would not require the policy to be re-presented to Cabinet for approval but would require written consent from the Leader of the Executive, in line with the Shareholder Agreement.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7.58 pm.