



Council

Members of the **Council of Gravesham Borough Council** are summoned to attend a meeting to be held at the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Windmill Street, Gravesend DA12 1AU on **Tuesday, 15 October 2024 at 7.30 pm** when the business specified in the following agenda is proposed to be transacted.

Most Council meetings can be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/graveshamtv>

You can watch them live or view previous recordings.

S Walsh
Assistant Director
(Organisational Development & Democratic Support)

Agenda

Part A

Items likely to be considered in Public

1. Apologies for absence
2. To sign the minutes of the extraordinary and ordinary meetings of Council (Pages 3 - 10) held on 18 June 2024
3. To declare any interests members may have in the items contained on this agenda. When declaring an interest a member must state what their interest is
4. To answer any questions received from members of the public of which notice has been given under Council Procedure Rule 13
5. Minutes of Committees

To receive and adopt the proceedings, reports and recommendations of

Civic Centre, Windmill Street, Gravesend Kent DA12 1AU

the following committees, except those items reserved under Council procedure Rule 5.2 (6) and to ratify and confirm the orders made by them.

- a) Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 24 June 2024 (Pages 11 - 16)
- b) Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 16 July 2024 (Pages 17 - 26)
- c) Minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on Monday, 2 September 2024 (Pages 27 - 32)
- d) Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 9 September 2024 (Pages 33 - 40)
- e) Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 17 September 2024 (Pages 41 - 48)
- f) Minutes of the meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 19 September 2024 (Pages 49 - 54)
- g) Minutes of the meeting of Planning Committee held on Wednesday 25 September 2024 (Pages 55 - 60)
- h) Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 30 September 2024 (Pages 61 - 64)

6. Reserved Minutes

To receive and adopt the proceedings, reports and recommendations of committees contained in the list of items reserved under Council Procedure Rule 5.2(6) and to ratify the orders made by them. They will be dealt with in the following order:-

Cabinet
Finance & Audit Committee
Licensing Committee
Overview Scrutiny Committee
Planning Committee

To consider reports from officers of the Council

- 7. Finance and Audit Committee - Annual Report (Pages 65 - 78)
- 8. Changes to Committee Memberships September 2024 - For Information Only (Pages 79 - 80)
- 9. To consider questions from Members of the Council of which notice has been given under Council Procedure Rule 14.
- 10. To receive the Mayor's Announcements

Extraordinary Meeting of Council**Tuesday, 18 June 2024****7.30 pm****Present:**

The Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr Daniel Adewale King
 The Deputy Mayor, Cllr Jenny Wallace

Councillors:

Derek Ashenden	Jordan Meade
Helen Ashenden	Alan Metcalf
Rajinder Atwal	Lyn Milner
Gurjit Bains	Shane Mochrie-Cox
David Beattie	Emma Morley
John Burden	Karina O'Malley
Lee Croxton	Leslie Pearton
Dakota Dibben	Tony Rana
Aaron Elliott	Alan Ridgers
Emma Elliott	Christina Rolles
Gary Harding	Lenny Rolles
Jo Hart	Benjamin Sizer
Baljit Hayre	Lauren Sullivan
Leslie Hills	Ektaveen Thandi
Samir Jassal	Narinderjit Singh Thandi
Gavin Larkins	Alison Williams

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities & Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive
Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Tom Reynolds	Director (Environment)
Simon Walsh	Assistant Director (Organisational Development & Democratic Support)
Vicky Nutley	Head of Legal Services
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

22. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ejaz Aslam, Gurdip Bungar, Deborah Croxton, Peter Scollard and Frank Wardle.

23. Admittance of Honorary Aldermen

It was proposed by Councillor John Burden and seconded by Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox that in recognition of their eminent service to the Borough Council, the following former Councillors, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that expenditure be authorised to enable an address to be presented to each of the new Honorary Aldermen:-

- John Caller
- Brian Sangha
- Harold Craske
- Tony Pritchard
- Brian Francis

An amendment was moved by Councillor John Burden and seconded by Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox that each former Councillor be considered in turn.

The amendment was put to the meeting; 15 Members voted in favour of the amendment and 15 Members voted against the amendment. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.2, the Mayor exercised his casting vote and voted in favour of the amendment. Therefore, it was **resolved** that each former Councillor would be considered in turn.

In accordance with paragraph 19.4 of Annex 2.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, it was demanded, by more than five Members, that a **recorded vote** be taken on each of the former Councillors.

1. In recognition of his eminent service to the Borough Council, **John Caller**, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared to be **lost** as it did not achieve the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting as required by legislation (the motion needed to be supported by no less than 23 Members).

For the motion – 19 Members	Against the motion – 15 Members	Abstain
The Worshipful the Mayor Cllrs: Atwal, Burden, L Croxtan, Hart, Hayre, Larkins, L Milner, Mochrie-Cox, Morley, O'Malley, Rana, C Rolles, L Rolles, Sullivan, E Thandi, N Thandi, Wallace, Williams.	Cllrs: D Ashenden, H Ashenden, Bains, Beattie, Dibben, A Elliott, E Elliott, Harding, Hills, Jassal, Meade, Metcalf, Pearton, Ridgers, Sizer.	None.

2. In recognition of his eminent service to the Borough Council, **Brian Sangha**, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared to be **lost** as it did not achieve the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting as required by legislation (the motion needed to be supported by no less than 23 Members).

For the motion – 19 Members	Against the motion – 15 Members	Abstain
The Worshipful the Mayor Cllrs: Atwal, Burden, L Croxtan, Hart, Hayre, Larkins, L Milner, Mochrie-Cox, Morley, O'Malley, Rana, C Rolles, L Rolles, Sullivan, E Thandi, N Thandi, Wallace, Williams.	Cllrs: D Ashenden, H Ashenden, Bains, Beattie, Dibben, A Elliott, E Elliott, Harding, Hills, Jassal, Meade, Metcalf, Pearton, Ridgers, Sizer.	None.

3. In recognition of his eminent service to the Borough Council, **Harold Craske**, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared to be **lost** as it did not achieve the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting as required by legislation (the motion needed to be supported by no less than 23 Members).

For the motion – 19 Members	Against the motion – 15 Members	Abstain
The Worshipful the Mayor Cllrs: Atwal, Burden, L Croxtan, Hart, Hayre, Larkins, L Milner, Mochrie-Cox, Morley, O'Malley, Rana, C Rolles, L Rolles, Sullivan, E Thandi, N Thandi, Wallace, Williams.	Cllrs: D Ashenden, H Ashenden, Bains, Beattie, Dibben, A Elliott, E Elliott, Harding, Hills, Jassal, Meade, Metcalf, Pearton, Ridgers, Sizer.	None.

4. In recognition of his eminent service to the Borough Council, **Tony Pritchard**, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared to be **lost** as it did not achieve the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting as required by legislation (the motion needed to be supported by no less than 23 Members).

For the motion – 19 Members	Against the motion – 15 Members	Abstain
The Worshipful the Mayor Cllrs: Atwal, Burden, L Croxtton, Hart, Hayre, Larkins, L Milner, Mochrie-Cox, Morley, O'Malley, Rana, C Rolles, L Rolles, Sullivan, E Thandi, N Thandi, Wallace, Williams.	Cllrs: D Ashenden, H Ashenden, Bains, Beattie, Dibben, A Elliott, E Elliott, Harding, Hills, Jassal, Meade, Metcalf, Pearton, Ridgers, Sizer.	None.

5. In recognition of his eminent service to the Borough Council, **Brian Francis**, be admitted as an Honorary Alderman pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared to be **lost** as it did not achieve the support of two thirds of those Members present and voting as required by legislation (the motion needed to be supported by no less than 23 Members).

For the motion – 19 Members	Against the motion – 15 Members	Abstain
The Worshipful the Mayor Cllrs: Atwal, Burden, L Croxtton, Hart, Hayre, Larkins, L Milner, Mochrie-Cox, Morley, O'Malley, Rana, C Rolles, L Rolles, Sullivan, E Thandi, N Thandi, Wallace, Williams.	Cllrs: D Ashenden, H Ashenden, Bains, Beattie, Dibben, A Elliott, E Elliott, Harding, Hills, Jassal, Meade, Metcalf, Pearton, Ridgers, Sizer.	None.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.01 pm.

Council

Tuesday, 18 June 2024

7.45 pm

Present:

The Worshipful the Mayor, Cllr Daniel Adewale King
The Deputy Mayor, Cllr Jenny Wallace

Councillors:

Derek Ashenden	Jordan Meade
Helen Ashenden	Alan Metcalf
Rajinder Atwal	Lyn Milner
Gurjit Bains	Shane Mochrie-Cox
David Beattie	Emma Morley
John Burden	Karina O'Malley
Lee Croxton	Leslie Pearton
Dakota Dibben	Tony Rana
Aaron Elliott	Alan Ridgers
Emma Elliott	Christina Rolles
Gary Harding	Lenny Rolles
Jo Hart	Benjamin Sizer
Baljit Hayre	Lauren Sullivan
Leslie Hills	Ektaveen Thandi
Samir Jassal	Narinderjit Singh Thandi
Gavin Larkins	Alison Williams

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities & Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive
Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Tom Reynolds	Director (Environment)
Simon Walsh	Assistant Director (Organisational Development & Democratic Support)
Vicky Nutley	Head of Legal Services
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

24. Glen Handley and Kenneth Jones

Those present stood in silence in memory of Glen Handley and Kenneth Jones, former Councillors of the Council, who had passed away.

25. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ejaz Aslam, Gurdip Bungar, Deborah Croxton, Peter Scollard and Frank Wardle.

26. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 May 2024 were signed by the Mayor.

27. Declarations of Interest

The Chief Executive advised that, in accordance with advice received from the Council's Monitoring Officer, Members only needed to declare interests which had not already been listed within their Disclosable Pecuniary Interests form.

No declarations of interest were made.

28. To answer any questions received from members of the public of which notice has been given under Council Procedure Rule 13

The following question had been submitted:-

Question received from Michael Hughes:-

Given that every computer model published by the IPCC has been wildly at odds with the evidence,

- that the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere is controlled primarily by atmospheric interaction with oceans, vegetation and other sinks,
- that man-made emissions of CO₂ make very little difference (if any) to the total amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere,
- that the eye-wateringly expensive attempts to mitigate or control CO₂ are futile and an unsustainable drain on the country's let alone the borough's finances,
- that it is clear that the public is being hoodwinked. The numbers do not add up.

Given the above will the council exercise its right, known as the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates, and refuse all central government policies that impoverish people, adversely impact people's lives or restrict people's freedoms in any way?

Response by Cllr John Burden, Leader of the Council:-

In declaring a climate emergency and adopting its own Climate Change Strategy, the Council followed the evidence set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The Council considers the information produced by the IPCC as an internationally recognised source of scientific research in the area of Climate Change.

The Council does not consider climate change policies to be manifestly unjust or to have an adverse impact on people's freedom. It therefore will not be looking to refuse central government policies on this issue.

29. Minutes of Committees

Motions that proceedings, reports and recommendations of Committees, except those reserved under Council Procedure 5.2(6) as referred to below be received and adopted and where applicable the Orders made by them be ratified and confirmed were duly proposed, seconded and resolved in each case.

- Minutes of the Planning Committee held on Tuesday, 30 April 2024;
- Minutes of the Planning Committee held on Wednesday, 22 May 2024;
- Minutes of the Cabinet held on Tuesday, 28 May 2024; and
- Minutes of the Planning Committee held on Wednesday, 12 June 2024.

30. Reserved Minutes

There were no reserved minutes.

31. To consider reports from officers of the Council

There were no reports from officers of the Council.

32. To consider questions from Members of the Council of which notice has been given under Council Procedure Rule 14.

No questions had been received.

33. To receive the Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members that 'What Ellenor Means to Me' Art Exhibition had now opened at the St Georges Art Centre and encouraged everyone to attend if they could.

The Mayor advised that he would be organising charity events throughout his mayoral year and encouraged everyone to come together to support those events.

The Mayor invited those present to join him in the Parlour for refreshments.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm.

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Cabinet**Monday, 24 June 2024****7.30 pm****Present:**

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

Councillors: Emma Morley
Karina O'Malley
Lauren Sullivan
Narinderjit Singh Thandi

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Tom Reynolds	Director (Environment)
Alex Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

18. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28 May 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

20. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

22. General Fund Provisional Outturn Report 2023/24

The Cabinet was presented with the 2023/24 provisional General Fund Outturn Report.

The report was titled as provisional as the accounts were still subject to the external audit process and any changes arising from that process would be reported in due course.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) drew Members' attention to page 12 which held an executive summary of the report.

The provisional outturn position for the year was a favourable variance of just under £300,000 which included favourable items such as salaries underspend, budget rationalisation, interest payable and reduction in energy costs. However, there were significant cost pressures/adverse variances, the most notable items being Leisure Services, St George's Centre and Homelessness. Homelessness currently represented the largest single area of budget pressure so was closely being monitored; a lot of proactive work had and will continue to be undertaken in order to mitigate the impact with the previously projected variance of £1 million being reduced.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) drew Members' attention to the favourable variance of £1.2 million from interest and investment income which had enabled the transfer of £600,000 to the Investment Income Equalisation Reserve.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) also advised that following completion of the external audit of the 2019/20 accounts, the estimates in relation to the St George's Shopping Centre transaction had been replaced by the actual interest charges accounted for, the effect of which had been reflected within a Debt Repayment Reserve.

The wider financial context was detailed within the report including working balances, earmarked reserves and the capital programme.

The Cabinet welcomed the transparency and management of the account/budgets and commended Officers particularly in relation to the proactive work being undertaken on homelessness which had resulted in a positive impact on the budget compared to the previously projected variance. The Cabinet stated that some of the adverse variances were outside of the Council's control and, in relation to St George's Shopping Centre, it was currently outperforming the national shopping centre vacancy rate and a lot of work was ongoing to support the High Street.

The Cabinet noted the report.

23. Housing Revenue Account Provisional Outturn 2023/24

The Cabinet was presented with the 2023/24 provisional Housing Revenue Account Outturn Report.

As with the General Fund, the report was titled as provisional as the accounts were still subject to the external audit process and any changes arising from that process would be reported in due course.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) drew Members' attention to page 36 which held an executive summary of the report.

At the end of the financial year, income and expenditure for the year was balanced with a contribution of £500k to establish a HRA Priorities Reserve which would allow Officers to apply to for one-off financing in relation to a project, system, scheme etc which they wish to pursue and would result in future savings/efficiencies.

Within the figures, there were some significant variances both favourable and adverse, the most notable being:-

- a favourable variance against vacancy savings;
- an adverse variance on the repairs and maintenance service which had resulted in a £1.5 million overspend due to a sustained level of demand, high number of staff vacancies and high cost of materials;
- an adverse variance on the capital financing budget of £5.8 million however this reflected a number of positive actions taken within Finance which included the repayment of £6.8 million of debt, the reduction in the use of direct revenue funding to support the capital programme of £3.6 million and the receipt of external grant money of £3 million; and
- an adverse variance on rental income of £453,000 which was due to a combination of factors such as the high number of properties sold in the previous year under the Right to Buy scheme, slower delivery of the new build properties and an increase in the number of void properties however the high number of properties sold under Right to Buy had produced a favourable variance for service charges as more income was generated through leasehold service charges.

The wider financial context was detailed within the report including working balances and the capital programme.

In relation to debt repayment, the Cabinet welcomed that debt totalling £6.8 million had been repaid. It had recently been reported in the media that the Council had one of the highest debt provisions compared to others local authorities in Kent. A high proportion of the Council's debt related to the Government's requirement for local authorities to buy back their own housing stock. The Cabinet asked what the current debt level was; the Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) confirmed that it was circa £52 million.

The Cabinet highlighted that, in relation to voids, the Council will upgrade and improve void properties to the standards required and will only spend what is necessary. Extensive works would only be undertaken when required, in situations such as, when a long-standing tenant may have sadly passed away and were reluctant to allow the Council to undertake any works during their tenancy, removal of adaptations within properties etc.

It was noted that there was a high number of staff vacancies, Members asked why the Council was experiencing difficulty in recruiting. The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) advised that the difficulty in recruiting was across the Council and not necessarily restricted to Housing. The Leader stated that the Council had a good system in place to ensure that all Officers were paid equally and try to recruit as quickly as practicable. However, if there was a particular post causing difficulty in recruitment, the only way to regrade that post would be to regrade everyone in that post or to re-evaluate the post which can be a lengthy process. The Cabinet appreciated those teams/Officers who were currently taking on additional workload/pressures during the recruitment process.

The Leader stated that it was important to note that the HRA was ringfenced in that it was paid for and reserved to Council tenants/properties and cannot be used for any other purpose.

The Cabinet noted the report.

24. Financial Update and Balancing the Budget

The Cabinet was presented with a report which provided information on the current financial challenges facing the Council, particularly in relation to the General Fund Budget. The report set out the Council's fiscal journey since 2020, the actions already taken to respond to the increasingly challenging financial position and those planned under the Balancing the Budget programme.

As previously reported, the Director (Corporate Services) advised that Local Government had been subject to a sustained period of financial uncertainty over the last fourteen years.

In February 2020, the Council was able to set a balanced budget for the forthcoming year, with financial projections at that time indicating that the Council would not be required to make any additional savings across the medium-term financial planning period to 2028-29. Planned expenditure for the period was able to be met from anticipated income or usable working balances. In the four years since February 2020, the financial landscape had significantly altered mainly due to issues outside of the Council's control such as the pandemic, rising demand for Council services and economic factors. In February 2022, the Council found itself in a position where it was required to undertake a proactive programme of activity to manage its budget position via the 'Balancing the Budget programme'. Since this time the Council had seen budget pressures of some £7m, had proactively delivered base budget reductions of £3.3m and was operating with a financial budget of an equivalent value to the budget set by the Council in 2010/11.

The Budget Setting report presented to Full Council in February 2024 presented a stark outlook with the need to deliver a further £3.7m of base budget reductions, through either additional income or expenditure savings, to manage the Council's ongoing financial position and maintain financial sustainability beyond the 2024/25 financial year. The urgency around action to deliver the Balancing the Budget Initiatives had required a renewed focus from both Officers and Members. Work between the Administration and Management Team had resulted in the Council now being in a position where it had identified activity totalling £3.9m to deliver the Balancing the Budget Programme. The report detailed the proposed plan.

The Cabinet welcomed the report as it sets out how the Council had and will be making savings to respond to the budget deficit all of which had been reported in an open and transparent way as listed within the background documents of the report.

In relation to future savings, the Cabinet would be working closely with Officers to deliver those savings. A significant issue the Council was currently facing was the delay of some of its key projects; this was due to the impact not only on the capital budget but also the revenue/cash flow of the authority. One of those key projects being Cascade Leisure Centre; the delay was due to the change in interest rates, material prices, build-out values and the impact of the Lower Thames Crossing however, those projects that had been delayed, would be progressed at an appropriate time.

As detailed within the report, the Cabinet highlighted that if the Council's settlement had increased by inflation alone then the Council would have an additional £10 million per year to spend. The Council had continued to receive flat cash from 2010 meaning that the same budget over the last fourteen years was still being used to deliver an increased level of services/pressures. The Cabinet stated that Members do not wish to make cuts and/or reduce services etc., however, they had a legal obligation to respond to the Council's challenging financial position even though some of those challenges were external pressures which were outside of the Council's Control.

The Leader stated that there was a combination of two areas being explored in order to achieve the savings required. Firstly, the Council will look at the administrative areas of each service area to see if any savings and/or income streams can be achieved without significantly changing the service delivery. Secondly, the Council will look at savings and/or income streams beyond that and if a change in service delivery was required then those proposals would be presented to the Cabinet for consideration. The Cabinet thanked those Members and Officers that had contributed to date in suggesting areas of savings and/or income streams in order to assist with the budget deficit.

25. Minutes of the meeting of the Gravesham Joint Transportation Board held on Wednesday, 29 May 2024

The Cabinet noted the minutes of the Gravesham Joint Transportation Board held on Wednesday, 29 May 2024.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.04 pm.

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Finance and Audit Committee**Tuesday, 16 July 2024****7.30pm****Present:**

Cllr Ektaveen Thandi (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 David Beattie
 Lee Croxton
 Aaron Elliott
 Lyn Milner
 Tony Rana
 Jenny Wallace

Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Pat Knight	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Andrew Barnett	Principal Accountant (General Fund)
Alex Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer)
James Larkin	Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service Manager
Paul Dossett	Grant Thornton, Partner
Parris Williams	Grant Thornton, Director (Public Sector Audit)
Jasmine Kemp	Grant Thornton, Public Sector Audit Manager
Chloe Taylor	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Larkins, Cllr Hart and Cllr Jassal. Cllr Rana, Cllr Milner and Cllr Beattie substituted respectively.

2. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee held on Tuesday 05 March 2024, were agreed and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. The Annual Audit Letter for Gravesham Borough Council - Year ended 31 March 2020

The External Auditor (Grant Thornton) presented the Finance and Audit committee with a report that summarised the key findings that arose from the statutory audit for the 2019/20 financial year. The following key points were highlighted:

- Members would recall there was an elongated process for the 2019/20 accounts, which had been previously reported back to the committee within the audit findings report and a separate value for money report.
- Under the code of practice that existed at the time, the External Auditor was also required to produce the Annual Audit letter. There was no new information included within the letter.

Following questions and comments from members, the External Auditor (Grant Thornton) explained that:

- Grant Thornton concluded the audit of the 2019/20 accounts late last year and issued the audit opinion earlier this year.
- All recommendations for the council relating to the 2019/20 accounts had been responded to by Management.
- In relation to the audit backlog position, the Partner and Director (Public Sector Audit) provided their view on the current position, indicating their view that they expected the government backstop process to require accounts to be completed and audited for all years up to 2022/23 by the end of the calendar year, and that the subsequent catch-up programme would support that in 3 years from now, all audits would be back to a position to meet deadlines. Audit opinions may remain qualified in some circumstances for a 5-year horizon. This was not specific to Gravesham and was the expectation across to the local government sector. Grant Thornton was fully committed to the catch-up process.
- In relation to the Value for Money assessment, the next report on the agenda confirmed that there was no backlog on the value for money work of the External Auditor. The Director (Public Sector Audit) expected legislation to be passed to support the proposed audit backlog and catch-up processes, but this would be impacted by the recent General Election.
- Management was currently in the process of producing draft accounts for the outstanding years. Grant Thornton expected the 2023/24 accounts to be provided to them by management in the coming months and have currently scheduled the audit to commence in February 2025. As set out later in the agenda, the audit plan for the 2023/24 accounts would give assurance over the closing balances at 31 March 2024 and the transactions in year.
- The Director (Corporate Services) advised that despite the challenges the external auditors and management had in clarity on what would be required and by when from the audit backlog and catch-up process, there was good communication and working between the external auditors and management about how they could work together to get to a position where for 203/24, they can meet the current 31 May 2025 deadline. It was accepted that there will be a need for the disclaimers on audit opinions because the auditors would not be able to do what they were required to do under their code, to deliver a true and fair view. As part of the consultation document issued by the previous government on the audit backlog, there were questions around what the disclaimers may look like and what they may contain – it was important that they were a fair reflection of the position.
- The External Auditor agreed that up and down the country, there were concerns. The progress report showed that Grant Thornton was ahead of other firms in terms of performance. The reasons for the current position were multifaceted and complicated, such as audit resources, technical issues, accounts preparation, regulation, and the abolition of the audit commission. They were closing off as much of the old accounts as they could and would be discussing the way forward.

The committee noted the report.

5. The Auditor's annual report on Gravesham Borough Council - Year 2020/21, 2021/22 & 2022/23

The External Auditor (Grant Thornton) presented the committee with a report detailing the findings of the external audit assessment of the councils' arrangements for securing economy, efficient and effectiveness in the use of its resources during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial year. The following key points were highlighted:

- The annual audit letter was under the old code of practice. For 2021 onwards, a new code of practice was introduced by the National Audit Office. The new code of practice required auditors to do more work in assessing value for money and required auditors to give a commentary on three areas: financial sustainability, governance, and arrangements for economy efficiency and effectiveness.
- This report brings together all the outstanding years, and summarised the detailed work done on value for money and gave an assessment for each year covered by the report.
- Governance, which was partly about scrutiny, risk management and internal audit/counter fraud, received a positive result.
- One key recommendation had been made regarding the need for the council to take action in relation to its financial sustainability in the medium term. This recommendation had also been made to many other council's facing the same financial challenges as Gravesham.
- Two improvement recommendations were issued relating to reporting on capital schemes and the council's procurement strategy.
- Management responses had been received for all recommendations made.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Director (Corporate Services) and the External Auditor (Grant Thornton) explained that:

- As part of the budget setting process, one of the Section 151 Officers obligations was to produce a section 25 report that sets out their view of the robustness of the budget process as well as the suitability of the council's level of reserves and working balances. This had flagged to all Members that the council were making use the working balances at a rate which was not sustainable.
- The 2024/25 budget was drawing down on around £1.95m from working balances to meet the spend plans for the year.
- The minimum level of working balances was £5.25m. This was made up of two sums: £2m to manage cashflow and £3.25m for a general reserve. It was indicated that based on projections at the time of setting the budget, at the end of the 2024/25 financial year, the council would have eaten into the £3.25m general reserve and that this was not a sustainable position for the council to maintain.
- Grant Thornton recognised that financial sustainability was an issue for all councils. Therefore, they were looking for how the council governs its finances. They noted Gravesham Borough Council was doing the best they could to extract the maximum from investments with partnerships, which was seen as proactive, and overall, the report was positive.

The committee noted the report.

6. Indicative External Audit Plan - Year ending 31 March 2024

The Director (Public Sector Audit) (Grant Thornton) presented the committee with a report that informed them of the indicative scope and timing of the statutory audit for the 2023/24 financial year. It drew members attention to key matters that would be considered to form part of the statutory audit process. The following key points were highlighted:

- The plan was labelled indicative as the risk assessment could not be completed fully with the open years from previous financial statements. Once the audit process for these years had been concluded, the External Auditor could confirm whether the indicative risk assessment has changed. However, the External Auditor did not expect it to significantly change.
- The External Auditor had identified 7 significant risks, purely in relation to the financial statements audit. It was explained that the first 5 would be seen on every local authority. The other two significant risks were specific to Gravesham Borough Council and related to the introduction of Group Accounts and The Charter redevelopment project.
- The External Auditor confirmed the intention to start the works on the 23/24 accounts in February 2025, subject to the draft statements being prepared by the council. It was noted that this did give auditors a short window to complete the audit against the timelines included within the recent consultation document.
- There were some fee variations subject to approval by PSAA.

Following questions and comments from members, the Director (Public Sector Audit) (Grant Thornton) and the Director (Corporate Services) explained that:

- Page 136 detailed a full reconciliation of the fees and proposed fee variations.
- Group consolidation refers to the group position where the council has consolidated the transactions of its Local Authority Trading Company, Rosherville Limited, and its subsidiaries and of the council. The intercompany element looks at transactions between the council and its subsidiaries. In producing the group accounts, management have to identify those intercompany transactions and eliminate them to produce the fair and true position of the group.
- It was recognised that local authorities in general were in a difficult position. Gravesham was not immune to those external pressures being felt by other local government bodies, as highlighted in the significant weaknesses raised in financial sustainability. The reserves for Gravesham Borough Council were depleting and towards the lower end of reserves being sustainable. The Director (Public Sector Audit) (Grant Thornton) advised that there were two types of councils; the first being councils that have taken decisions that did not turn out well and they found themselves in financial difficulties resulting in s114 (bankruptcy) notices being issued, and that was usually due to poor governance. He did not believe this was the case for Gravesham based on his initial risk assessment. The second cohort of local authorities had good governance and made sound decisions, but the financial pressures put them into a difficult position. He felt that Gravesham was absolutely within the latter category driven by inflationary costs and increase demand particularly around homelessness (temporary accommodation).

The committee noted the report.

7. Informing the audit risk assessment for Gravesham Borough Council 2023/24

The Public Sector Audit Manager (Grant Thornton) presented the committee with a report to provide them with the opportunity to consider and discuss the responses to a number of questions posed by the external auditor in relation to the council's management processes and arrangements for oversight in a number of areas.

The responses to the questions were prepared by management. They were presented to the committee as part of a requirement under auditing standards, and it was for the committee to decide whether the responses were consistent with its understanding.

Resolved that Members agreed the responses contained within appendix one were consistent with its understanding of the council's management processes and arrangements for oversight.

8. Audit Progress Report and Sector Updates - July 2024

The Director (Public Sector Audit) (Grant Thornton) presented the committee with a report informing them of the progress to date on the work of external audit. Members attention was drawn to emerging national issues and developments that may be relevant. The sector updates provided useful information for the committee.

The committee noted the report.

9. General Fund Provisional Outturn Report 2023/24

The Principal Accountant (General Fund) presented Members with the 2023/24 General Fund provisional outturn report 2023/24.

The following key points were highlighted:

- The report was titled as provisional as the accounts were still subject to the external audit process and any changes arising from that process would be reported at a future date.
- The provisional outturn position for the year was a favourable variance of just under £300,000 against the original budget position, which included favourable items such as salaries underspend, proactive action to manage the council's budget, interest payable and reduction in energy costs.
- The level of Working Balances at year-end was expected to be £6.35m.
- The Principal Accountant drew Members attention to significant variances contained within the report.
- Homelessness continued to be a challenging area with adverse variances of £756,000 – due to the proactive work of officers this figure has reduced from the previously reported figure of around £1m. Homelessness and temporary accommodation represented the single largest area of budgetary pressure across the council's General Fund.
- Expenditure on capital projects in the year was reported as just over some £10m. This compared to the original budget of around £74m, with movements related to adjustments associated with The Charter and the Leisure Centre scheme.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Principal Accountant (General Fund) explained that:

- During the year the council terminated the leasing structure in place for the St George's Shopping Centre, meaning the council now owned all levels of ownership for the centre.
- The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) explained that cash balances were made up from revenue generated during the year, plus any reserves held and capital receipts – these were used to fund the capital programme.
- Following a question from a Member, it was explained that it was possible to negotiate with the PWLB about early redemptions, but depending on prevailing interest rates compared to the rates when the loan was taken on, the PWLB would either charge a premium or a discount on any loans redeemed.

The committee noted the report.

10. Housing Revenue Account Provisional Outturn 2023/24

The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) presented the committee with a report that detailed the 2023/24 provisional Housing Revenue Account outturn including movements to the Housing Revenue Account working balances and general reserves. The report also presented the 2023/24 provisional Housing Revenue Account Capital Outturn.

The following key points were highlighted:

- The report was titled as provisional as the accounts were still subject to the external audit process.
- As of 31 March 2024, income and expenditure on the HRA was balanced with a contribution of £500,000 to establish a HRA priorities reserve fund for one-off costs that may result in revenue or capital savings.
- The Principal Accountant drew Members attention to significant variances contained within the report.
- Whilst the capital financing budget had an adverse variance of £6.5m, it reflected the positive actions taken within the Finance Team to respond to high interest rates during the year and repayment of debt.
- The Housing Capital Programme original budget was £20.6m. Capital budgets totalling £3m were carried forward from 2022/23 into 2023/24 and new schemes were approved during the year which gave a revised budget of £39.5m. As at 31 March 2024 spend totalled £14.8m which gives a variance of £25.4m, the majority of which will be carried forward into 2024/24

The committee noted the report.

11. Treasury Management Annual Review 2023-24

The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) presented the committee with a report on treasury management during 2023/24 in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFAs) revised code on Treasury Management. It was recommended that delegated authority be given to the Director (Corporate Services), in consultation with the Chair of Finance and Audit Committee, to

amend the figures in this report, as necessary, following successful completion of the final accounts process.

The following key points were highlighted:

- During the year the authority incurred capital expenditure totalling £24.9m. £16.7 was financed leaving £8m unfinanced.
- In consultation with the section 151 officer, new external borrowing was minimalised by utilising external cash balances due to the high prevailing interest rate of new debt. As a result, debt levels were below the council's capital financing requirement at the end of the year, and the internal investment balances were significantly reduced compared to the previous year.
- The council's true debts, i.e. the loans it has taken out and the remaining outstanding as of 31 March 2024 totalled £152m. The council's net debt position was £133.9m. This incorporated debt associated with the Housing Revenue Account as well as the General Fund.
- Investments as at the end of 31 March 2024 totalled £18.9m.
- Capital values across all externally managed property funds have continued to fall during the year and gave a combined value of £8.5m at the end of 31 March 2024.
- The Lothbury property fund was hit with some significant redemptions in 2023 which meant the future of the fund was uncertain. Attempts to restructure and merge with another fund was not possible and as a result the fund was terminated on 30 May 2024. Distributions of that fund were being paid to the council monthly.

Resolved that Members noted the contents of the report and agreed for delegated authority be given to the Director (Corporate Services), in consultation with the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, to amend the figures in this report, as necessary following successful completion of the final accounts process.

12. Internal Audit Annual Report 2023-24

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service presented the committee with a report detailing the internal audit work completed during 2023-24. The report also outlined the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service, as Chief Audit Executive, on the council's internal control environment.

The following key points were highlighted:

- At the start of the year, it had been forecast that 400 days would be available for internal audit work. Due to the impact of one auditor reducing their hours and underestimating the level of time required for professional qualification training – 356 days of chargeable activity were undertaken.
- By the end of the year, 84% of the audit plan for the year had been delivered, with a further 11% completed after year-end 79.1% of audit recommendations made and agreed with management had been implemented by the agreed date.
- Based on the work of Internal Audit, the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Service, as Chief Audit Executive, was able to issue positive annual opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, internal control, and governance processes.

Resolved that Members endorsed the work undertaken by the internal audit team for Gravesham during 2024 in providing an effective service to the council.

Resolved that Members endorsed the opinion on the council's internal control environment provided by the Head of Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Shared Service.

13. Counter Fraud Annual Report 2023-24

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service presented the committee with a report showcasing the results of the counter fraud work completed during 2023-24, and highlighted the following key points:

- 352 days of chargeable activity were undertaken in the year, above the projected level of resource that would be available.
- The first fraud risk register for the council was presented in February 2024, and the top 10 risks were detailed within this report.
- There was good performance against all performance measures.
- The days for non-professional training had been split between two councils in error, making it 82.9 days – higher than projected.

Members noted the report and the importance of fraud awareness for the council.

14. Annual Governance Statement: 2023-24

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) presented the committee with a report seeking approval of the council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the 2023-24 financial year. The following key points were highlighted:

- As a local authority, the council has two core statutory duties relating to governance as legislated by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The first was to undertake an annual review of the council's governance framework and system of internal control. The second was to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement for the authority to report on its governance arrangements in the last financial year.
- The results of the review were duly considered and scrutinised by the council's AGS assurance group.
- The draft AGS was presented on page 359, with the key conclusion being that there were no significant control issues identified for the authority in 2023/24.
- There were several opportunities to further develop and strengthen the council's governance framework and system of internal control in 2024/25 and an action plan to take these opportunities forward had been included in the AGS.

Resolved that Members noted the findings of the review on the council's governance arrangements for 2023/24.

Resolved that Members approved and supported the Annual Governance Statement for the 2023/24 financial year.

15. Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Annual Surveys

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service presented the committee with a report to inform them of the results from the surveys aimed at identifying the level of

satisfaction with the services provided by the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Teams. The following key points were highlighted:

Internal Audit Survey

- The internal audit survey was issued to service managers and higher, including elected members as they were most likely to interact with internal audit.
- 13 responses were provided – broadly consistent with previous years.
- Responses received indicated a good understanding of internal audit's role.
- Responses received indicated a good level of satisfaction with the services provided by Internal Audit, with a positive response received from all respondents. Respondents were also satisfied with the overall service received, with 100% of those confirming receipt of services from the Internal Audit Team within the last twelve months, providing a positive score.

Counter Fraud Survey

- The counter fraud survey was made available to all council employees.
- 57 responses were provided – consistent with previous years.
- It was disappointing to see that almost 20% did not have good awareness and understanding of the role of the Counter Fraud Team despite focused efforts of the team during the year to promote the service, including fraud awareness sessions. This will continue to be an area of focus for the team.
- Satisfaction with services available received a neutral score, with an average of 7.61 out of ten but the 14 respondents who had received services from counter fraud within the last twelve months gave an average score of 8.93 out of ten with positive feedback in 93% of responses.

The committee noted the report.

16. Learning from Local Government Interventions

The Director (Corporate Services) presented the committee with a report that updated Members on the actions to further enhance or strengthen governance and culture within the council identified as a result of the self-assessment conducted in September 2023.

- The self-assessment had concluded that that the council had many strengths in its organisational culture and governance arrangements, but it did identify opportunities to be built upon to continue to develop and enhance those arrangements going forward and an action plan had been developed for these.
- All actions identified through the self-assessment had been progressed and moving forward the intention would be to include those indicators of culture or governance issues in the annual governance assessment process.

The Director (Corporate Services) explained that through work with the External Auditor, an opportunity had been identified to improve the arrangements around producing business cases and supporting members in the decision-making process. As a result of that a business case report template had been developed.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director (Corporate Services) pointed the committee to a report presented to Cabinet in June 2024, which outlined some of those

decisions that Members have taken over the last 18 months relating to the council's financial position.

Resolved that Members approved and supported the report including the intention to include those indicators of culture or governance identified in the DLUHC Guidance in the annual governance assessment process.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.26pm

Licensing Committee**Monday, 2 September 2024****7.30 pm****Present:**

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Chair)
Cllr Jo Hart (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Rajinder Atwal
 Gurdip Ram Bungar
 Deborah Croxton
 Lee Croxton
 Gary Harding
 Jordan Meade
 Alan Metcalf
 Leslie Pearton
 Tony Rana
 Ektaveen Thandi

Mark Lees	Head of Community Protection
Mandy Francis	Licensing Manager
Emily Lane-Blackwell	Assistant Licensing Manager
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

1. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Frank Wardle.

2. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 were signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Jordan Meade, Leslie Pearton, Derek Ashenden and Helen Ashenden declared an 'other interest' in that they were all members of Higham Village Club.

Cllr Gary Harding declared he was now a director of company Driving Mrs Daisy.

4. Annual Review of the Licensing Shared Service

The Committee were presented with the Annual Review of the Licensing Shared Service. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Licensing Shared Service with Medway Council. The Annual Review had been presented to the Operational Services Cabinet Committee on 20 March 2023 and it had been requested to be presented to the Licensing Committee to update on the progress of the shared service.

The Licensing Manager outlined key areas of the report and highlighted that:

- The shared service began on 1 January 2019 with the team responsible for licensing functions for both Councils, outlined on page 1 of appendix 1 of the report.
- The team became fully staffed in November 2022 enabling progress to be made with compliance and enforcement activities including fee collections and associated interventions following nonpayment.
- In November 2022 a temporary staff structure (appendix B) was introduced with the acting up of 2 Members of staff. The loss of 2 other members of staff in summer 2023 had impacted the team, resulting in a greater focus on statutory duties pending recruitment to the vacant posts. These posts had now been filled with the previously acting up roles becoming permanent. The current structure of the team could be seen in appendix C. The restructure kept the same number of staff which was essential to manage the work of both authorities.
- The Licensing department were actively involved with multi agency groups such as the Kent and Medway Regulatory Licensing Steering Group and the Safety Advisory Groups for both authorities.
- Licensing Team members were all highly qualified having achieved professional licensing practitioners' qualifications and had completed other training courses.
- Debt collection and visits to licensed premises continued monthly to collect unpaid annual fees. Enforcement and compliance had resumed, including visits to licenced premises and vehicle inspections at taxi ranks.

The Chair welcomed questions from the Committee:

- Members noted that the reason the shared service was initially formed was to achieve financial savings but acknowledged that the report did not express how robust these savings were, especially in the current financial situation for both authorities. The Head of Community Protection advised there had been approximately £50K of savings obtained when the initial structure of the shared service was created, which had been retained. Since that time the number of staff remained the same, meaning no savings had been made in addition. Every year under the annual fees and charges review process, the locally set fees were implemented for cost recovery. Licensing was required to operate as a cost neutral function and could not collect surplus funds in the collection of fees. The shared service offered a robust service, even during the pandemic there was no impact to service provided with no complaints received. New burdens were frequently put on the team due to additional licensing regimes, which had been absorbed with no request for additional staffing.
- Members asked whether the report would be presented to Cabinet and if so whether some financial clarity could be included into the review. The Head of Community Protection informed Members the team would take that recommendation on board.

The Chair thanked the team for their work with the shared service.

The Committee noted the report

5. Review of Statement of Gambling Policy under the Gambling Act 2005

The Committee were presented with the Review of Statement of Gambling Policy under the Gambling Act 2005. The purpose of the report was to present Members with a draft of the revised Statement of Gambling Policy under the Gambling Act 2005 and the proposed consultation methodology, for their approval prior to consultation.

The Assistant Licensing Manager outlined key points from the report:

- The Gambling Act 2005 required every local authority to have a statement of gambling policy and for it to be reviewed every 3 years. Legislation required the new policy to be published 4 weeks prior to it coming into effect. The current policy expired on 30 January 2025, meaning the new policy needed to be published no later than 3 January 2025.
- The Gambling Commission published a statutory guidance document for licencing authorities, as prescribed by the Gambling Act 2005. All authorities were required to consider any amendments made to the guidance when reviewing their policy. However, the Gambling Commission had informed authorities that they have ongoing consultations, and it was unlikely new guidance would be implemented in time for the requirement of the new policies. Therefore, there were no amendments proposed by the Gambling Commission.
- The Assistant Licensing Manager has carried out a review of the current policy and proposed some minor changes:
 - To ensure the document was fully accessible to all persons once published on the website
 - To replace the appendices containing the responsible authorities contact details with a link to the website.
- Gravesham had a no casinos resolution within the policy which was also reviewed every 3 years.
- The consultation would involve letters and emails being sent to all those outlined in section 6.3 of the report and advertised via the Council's website. The consultation was proposed to last 4 weeks. The results of the consultation would be brought back to the committee for consideration.

The Chair noted that the item would come back to the Licensing Committee meeting on 5 November 2024 followed by Full Council on 3 December

The Chair invited questions from the Committee:

- Members queried what a banned casino would be identified as in Gravesham. The Assistant Licensing Manager explained that there were two types of casinos under the Gambling Act, small and large, with a restriction on how many were permitted throughout the country. Gravesham was not permitted to have one on this basis.

The Committee noted the report.

6. Update on Licensing Panel hearings and decisions since the last Committee meeting

The Assistant Licensing Manager updated Members that since the last Committee meeting on 11 November 2023, four licensing panel hearings had taken place.

- 11 December 2023 - New Premises Licence - Dover Local, 44 Dover Road East, Gravesend:
Decision - The panel were satisfied with the objections raised could be allayed by the reduction in hours on the Friday and Saturday.
- 3 April 2024 - New Premises Licence – Dizz Hubb, Ebbsfleet Rainbow Centre, Rose Street, Northfleet:
Decision - The panel decided to reduce the opening hours to 8am until midnight every day at both venues with Kent Police and licensing conditions added. There was also an additional condition set for sound proofing.
- 13 June 2024 - Review of the premises licence - Kings News and Wine, 21C King Street, Gravesend:
Decision – The panel decided to revoke the licence as no conditions could be imposed to ensure that the objectives could be upheld. The decision has been appealed to the Magistrates’ Court by the licence holder. The first legal hearing would take place on 18 October 2024. Due to the appeal the premises were legally able to trade until the final decision by the Magistrates’ court.
- 21 June 2024 – Full variation of premises licence – The Page, 1-2 Parrock Street, Gravesend:
Decision – The panel decided to grant the variation but with some amendments – the licensable hours for live music, recorded music, sale of alcohol and late-night refreshments were altered. The overall opening hours of the premises were amended also. Conditions were added to stipulate that the rear garden closed at midnight with the clear up beginning at 11.30pm. There was also a requirement for door supervisors to be on duty on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday until closing.

The Chair thanked Members for their time during the recent panel hearings and invited any comments.

There was confusion regarding the Dizz Hubb application, as Members understood that Planning Permission had not been granted for the required use. The Assistant Licensing Manager explained that although this may have been the case, planning and licensing were separate regimes. The only way planning would be involved would be if they submitted a representation relating to one of the licensing applications, which was not received. It was noted that anything approved by Licensing did not supersede planning law, so would not be able to carry out the activities applied for, if the necessary planning permission was not in place.

Clarification was sought regarding the appeal process in relation to the Kings News and Wine hearing. The Assistant Licensing Manager explained that once a decision was made at a panel hearing the applicant or objector had 21 days to appeal to the Magistrates’ court. If the appeal took place within the 21 days, the outcome of the hearing would not take effect and would be determined by the outcome of the Magistrates’ court hearing.

Members discussed the case of Kings New and Wine in some depth:

- Members were disappointed to hear that Kings News and Wine were permitted to continue trading until the decision of the Magistrates' court but understood the legal position. It was felt that Members should lobby the MP for a change in licensing law, to prevent trading during the appeal period when a licence had been revoked, especially considering the current wait time for Magistrates' hearings.
- In order to ensure a robust case was put forward to the Magistrate, Members requested that the best legal officers be present at the hearing as there was concern that potentially losing the case sent a poor message to others and undermined the work of the licensing authority. The Head of Community Protection explained that the Magistrates' hearing was set in statute and would be dealt with under the expertise of the legal team. He would pass on the message to the legal team, expressing the importance of this case.
- Members queried how many visits the licensing team had been carried out to ensure Kings News and Wine were not continuing to breach the conditions. The Assistant Licensing Manager updated that the licensing team had visited twice since and would continue to check.
- Members asked whether an injunction was possible to stop trading whilst waiting for the Magistrates' hearing. The Head of Community Safety advised that he was not speaking on behalf of the legal team, but he believed it would not be appropriate or viable.
- The Committee wondered, if it was noted that the premises were still breaching the licensing law prior to the hearing, if further action could be taken. The Head of Community Safety advised that if there was any new evidence, legal advice would be sought, to see if any additional options were available.
- Members all agreed that the Magistrates' case would be strengthened by having Members of the panel present at the hearing, to relay why the licence was revoked. The Chair agreed and suggested having the case as an agenda item at the next Licensing Committee meeting to discuss in greater depth.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:15pm

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Cabinet**Monday, 9 September 2024****7.30 pm****Present:**

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

Councillors: Deborah Croxton
Emma Morley
Karina O'Malley

Note: Councillors Leslie Hills and Lenny Rolles were also in attendance.

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive
Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Tom Reynolds	Director (Environment)
Pat Knight	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Laura Caiels	Assistant Head of Legal Services
Kath Donald	Strategic Manager, Community Safety
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

26. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Narinderjit Singh Thandi.

The Leader advised that, following the outcome of the General Election held on 4 July 2024, Councillor Lauren Sullivan had officially resigned from her role as Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure with Councillor Deborah Croxton being appointed to that position.

The Leader welcomed Councillor Croxton to the Cabinet.

27. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 24 June 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

28. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

29. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

30. Annual Performance Report: 2023-24

The Chief Executive presented the Cabinet with an annual report of the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for 2023-24.

Appendix 1 to the report provided Members with a statistical overview of the Council's outturn position for all of its 71 performance indicators.

Some of the highlights, for 2023-24, included:-

- 36 of the 71 performance indicators had been reported in the previous Corporate Plan period therefore the Council had five years' worth of data and 14 of those indicators had recorded their best year in 2023-24;
- Environmental Enforcement in terms of food establishments and penalty charge notices;
- Commercial Development in terms of the town centre valuation and the Council's investment portfolio yield;
- Development Management in terms of the turnaround time of minor planning applications;
- Housing Management in terms of voids and the safety work carried out; and
- Community Engagement in terms of the number of people who had engaged with the Council through Gravesham's Big Conversation and the turnaround time of housing benefits.

The annual report would now act as a point of reference for the coming years in the life of the Corporate Plan as the Council strived to continue to improve performance.

The Leader commended the good level of performance overall and highlighted that there were a few headline numbers which were of concerns however the background information would provide more context to those numbers for example PI 35 and PI 38; the Leader sought clarification on these indicators.

The Director (Housing) advised that in terms of PI 35 - % of council homes with valid electrical safety certification, this related to non-access to the properties therefore the Council had introduced a new process whereby it will obtain a warrant from the Court to access those properties. In terms of PI 38 - % of council homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard, the figure had now improved since publication of the annual report. The figure was based on how the calculation is set up within the software system. The calculation/set up, had been adjusted to ensure that it was reflecting accurately. Therefore, it was likely that an improvement would now be seen over the coming months. The Director (Housing) advised that the Council was providing a good quality of standard as it invested heavily into its housing stock.

It was also noted that, PI 6 - % of household waste recycled, was 40% and it was asked why this figure was so low. The Director (Environment) advised that 11 out of 13 districts in Kent had seen a drop in their recycling, however, in quarter 1 there had been an improvement as the figure was now at 42.4%. The Council had seen a rise in food waste over the last year and contamination and residual waste had fallen. Going forwards, incorporating glass and adjustments to the service, the Council should see an upturn on that figure.

The Cabinet thanked the Performance Management Team for their work to date on collating the statistics.

The Cabinet acknowledged that there was room for improvement on some of the indicators but also noted that there may be background/context as to why the indicators were at a certain level therefore it was key for the Portfolio Holder and respective Cabinet Committees to explore these further.

The Cabinet noted the report.

31. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2024-25

The Chief Executive presented the Cabinet with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2024-25, covering the period April to June 2024.

Appendix 1 to the report provided Members with a statistical overview of the Council's performance.

Following review by the Cabinet, each Cabinet Committee will be presented with an individual performance report tailored to the respective portfolio. Alongside statistical content, these will provide more detailed qualitative updates outlining what activity the Council had delivered, and what was to be taken, to successfully realise the Corporate Plan's objectives and policy commitments for the 2023-27 period.

The Leader highlighted that, due to the report reflecting quarter 1, the Portfolio Holder was showing as Councillor Lauren Sullivan however this would be updated for future reports to show Councillor Deborah Croxton as the Portfolio Holder.

The Leader stated that it was for Portfolio Holders and their respective Cabinet Committees to scrutinise the performance data.

It was highlighted that within the Leader's Portfolio, under environmental actions, there was a perception of a drop in quarter one however it was important to note that it was a perception as the Council continued to successfully seek prosecutions. The Leader reiterated that the Council would prosecute anyone that was caught fly tipping within Gravesham.

The Cabinet noted the report.

32. Q1 Budget Monitoring Report - GF

The Cabinet received the first budget monitoring report for 2024/25 in relation to the General Fund showing the position up to 30 June 2024. The Cabinet noted the information provided on: -

- actual performance against the approved Revenue and Capital budgets for 2024/25, including projected variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity; and

- other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), or Financial Statements.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) drew Members' attention to page 54 which held an executive summary of the report.

At the end of quarter one, there was a projected £781k favourable variance for the year with significant movements against the budget as detailed within the report.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised that, although the situation continued to be challenging, the various initiatives being progressed were starting to have a positive budgetary impact.

There was a noticeable adverse variance in relation to the Inter Authority Waste Agreement which was detailed at section 3.5.3 of the report. There would be a full year ongoing adverse variance of £300k although for the current year this had been partly mitigated by additional income from 2023-24.

Whilst the Council had made positive progress during quarter one in responding to the challenges it faced, significant financial pressures and uncertainty remained; these factors were explored as part of the wider financial context, alongside an update of delivery of the Balancing the Budget programme.

The report provided a summary of:-

- the level of working balances with the year-end position being projected at £5.02m;
- a net decrease in earmarked reserves of £3.02m; and
- capital programme expenditure for 2024/25 being circa £2.2m to date.

The Cabinet welcomed the work being undertaken to make savings; one of the big successes being short term housing and thanked all of the teams involved. It was important for the Council to continue to make savings by exploring new or more efficient ways of working.

It was highlighted that on agenda page 65 reference had been made to the Rosherville Loan for The Charter. The Leader reiterated that the development was being delivered through the Council's wholly owned commercial trading company, Rosherville Property Development Ltd (RPDL). Works would be recommencing onsite as Curo had been appointed as the new contractor. The Leader stated that the development was 100% Council-owned and would be managed by the Council. The priority for apartments would be for Gravesham residents.

The Cabinet noted the report.

33. Q1 Budget Monitoring Report - HRA

The Cabinet received the first budget monitoring report for 2024/25 in relation to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) showing the position up to 30 June 2024. The Cabinet noted the information provided on: -

- actual performance against the approved Revenue and Capital budgets for 2024/25, including projected variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity; and
- other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, HRA Business Plan or Financial Statements.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) drew Members' attention to page 76 which held an executive summary of the report.

At the end of quarter one, expenditure exceeded income by £186k. In the coming weeks officers within Finance would be working with Housing colleagues to determine whether the spend could be met within the existing budget envelope. Without this confirmation, the report assumed that the shortfall would need to be met from the HRA general reserve. The cost of engaging contractors to undertake responsive repairs and the difficulty in recruiting to posts was the main contributing factor to the current forecasted budget position.

Significant movements against the budget were detailed within the report.

The HRA's capital programme had an operational budget of £33.1m but the working budget was actually £40.8m and, as at quarter one, the forecast spend was £25.1m resulting in a significant variance of £15.7m. In relation to New Builds and Acquisitions, the original budget was based on the assumption that the units within Cable Wharf would be acquired during the year. The purchase of these units would no longer proceed and therefore officers would be reviewing the current programme and will be looking to reprofile the budget as schemes come forward. The other proposed schemes in the pipeline were detailed within the report.

The Cabinet noted the report.

34. Safeguarding Policy

The Cabinet was informed that, as part of Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB) self-assessment of organisational arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of adults at risk (SAF) Peer Review, Gravesham Borough Council received several recommendations in relation to updating sections of its Safeguarding Policy. The policy was last reviewed in 2021 so it was due for renewal.

Following a thorough review, it was felt that the changes were largely administrative with references, language and legislative changes needing to be updated/incorporated. Those updates were detailed within section 2.1 of the report.

The Strategic Manager, Community Safety advised that the policy had been updated to be as robust and comprehensive as possible due to it being an extremely important document for the Council in terms of its role and responsibilities. It was felt that the Council was in a much stronger position than in previous years. For the first time, the Council now had a designated Safeguarding Officer as well as a Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Officer. Officers across the Council had also been identified to receive a high level of training in order to be safeguarding champions so the Council will have resilience. Training will also be offered to Members.

The Cabinet acknowledged the importance of the policy and commended the team, including the Community Safety Partnership, which operated in the shadows due to its

nature/supporting vulnerable people. It was the responsibility of all, both Members and officers, to highlight when they feel that there may be a need for help which can then be investigated further. It was the Council's role to help protect and promote the welfare of all children and vulnerable adults within the borough.

It was noted that there was a typographical error as the policy made reference to the Clinical Commissioning Groups which had now been abolished and had been replaced with the Integrated Care Partnerships and Board.

Resolved that the revised Safeguarding Policy be adopted and published subject to the above.

35. Climate Change Update

The Chief Executive advised that, in June 2019, the Council adopted a climate change pledge together with the Council's Climate Change Strategy thereafter.

The report reflected on the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy to date including a wide range of projects which had been developed and delivered by Council; these projects were detailed in section 2.1 of the report.

The Chief Executive advised that, due to significant barriers, it was now becoming clear that the Council was unlikely to meet its operational net zero target by 2030. An example of this being the replacement of the refuse freighters, the technology did not currently exist to convert those efficiently and effectively to fully electric due to the range/reliability required. The Council's emissions also account for less than 0.5% of the emissions generated within the borough. Therefore, given that 99.5% of emissions were not directly related to the Council, whilst activity would continue to reduce the Council's own operational emissions where this was practical and financially viable, the Council was proposing to shift its pledge to working with the community to reduce carbon emissions within the wider sector particularly in areas such as the transport, domestic and commercial industry as set out in section 4.2 of the report.

Subject to Cabinet's approval, officers will commence the process for developing a new Climate Change Strategy for the Council which will then be presented to Full Council for adoption.

The Leader stated that this would be an evolution of the Strategy not a change. It was right for the Council to set out its pledge to become net zero by 2030 in order for change to happen; the Council had implemented/achieved a number of significant changes since the pledge. The report set out the changes that had already taken place and those that had been identified for progression i.e. fleet replacement, Council-owned buildings etc however the Council needed to implement any changes in a cost-effective way and will not waste public funds or resources. Where it was not cost effective, work would continue on those areas to identify what alternative solutions were available.

Now that the Council was more aware and had experience in implementing climate change initiatives etc, it was felt that the Council would be best placed to make a difference in reducing the carbon emissions within the borough through its community leadership and placemaking role, working in partnership and engaging with its residents, businesses and local community groups, such as the Parish Councils, to raise climate awareness and

promote opportunities to take action to reduce emissions whilst also emphasising the co-benefits of doing this.

The Director (Environment) advised that, with regards to the replacement of the vehicle fleet, it needed to be a balanced approach. As the report set out, there had been success to date with 15% of the fleet electrified and 18 electric vehicle charging points being installed at the Brookvale Depot. The Council would continue to look for ways to meet its climate change commitments and in terms of the options for the replacement of the vehicle fleet this would be presented to Operational Services Cabinet Committee in November 2024 detailing how the Council was working in an opportune way, within its budgets, to help meet those commitments; the report will include an appraisal of all technologies/fuels available.

The Cabinet agreed that this was an evolution and that the Council needed to work in partnership as it was not responsible for all areas such as promoting active travel, investing in infrastructure/alternative travel solutions.

Resolved that Cabinet Members acknowledge the report and agree to commence the development of a new Climate Change Strategy for the Council.

36. Land Purchase - Lower Range Road

The Director (Housing) advised that, in early 2024, Gravesend Churches Housing Association (GCHA) approached the Council regarding the possibility of purchasing a site they owned which they longer wished to develop due to a change in their budgetary priorities in concentrating on upgrading existing stock.

Details were shared with Gravesham's development team which confirmed that the site had planning permission (ref 20190520) for 14 x 2 bed flats with the planning consent open due to preliminary works being started on site. Two bedrooms was currently the Council's biggest need on the housing register.

Key information was shared with the Council's valuation consultant (Graves Jenkins) who valued the site at £525,000 on the open market.

GCHA had expressed their wish for the site to be developed for affordable housing and were therefore willing to accept an offer that was lower than what they paid for the site but not to be in a loan covenant breach. Following consultation with Management Team, the Lead Member and Leader of the Council, the Council wrote to GCHA to make a formal offer subject to contract. The offer was to pay the market valuation and also effectively reimburse GCHA for the Section 106 Agreement fees they had paid; it was agreed that this seemed to be a fair approach.

Subject to Cabinet's approval, the Director (Housing) would share solicitor's details and will commence the legal and procurement process.

A financial appraisal of the scheme had been undertaken with the total cost being estimated at £4,660,680. The scheme would be funded through a combination of retained Right to Buy (RTB) receipts currently calculated for the financial appraisal as £2,257,356 and loan finance of £2,403,324. There would be the possibility that liaison with Homes England may mean rather than RTB receipts, Homes England grant may be secured, allowing Right to Buy receipts to be used for other programme schemes in the pipeline. All units will be for social

rent (subject to viability if circumstances change). The appraisal showed that the scheme would repay within a period of not more than 30 years.

The Cabinet stated that, if approved, there needed to be a clear plan for construction so that the site did not remain a stalled site. The Director (Housing) confirmed that, if approved, the intention will be to commence the governance process/appointment of a contractor as soon as practicable in order for the site to be developed without delay.

The Cabinet acknowledged this was a brownfield site and would meet the housing needs of the Council and its residents.

Resolved that:-

1. the Director (Housing) in consultation with the S.151 Officer and Lead Member be given delegated authority to purchase the site;
2. the Director (Housing) in consultation with the S.151 Officer and Lead Member be given delegated authority to use relevant frameworks to procure and award contracts (including direct award if appropriate) in accordance with Gravesham's Procurement Strategy; and
3. the Director (Housing) in consultation with the S.151 Officer and Lead Member be given delegated authority to negotiate and agree on amendments both contractually and budgetary if required as long as the returned tender price and any subsequent amendments, relative to anticipated rental income, continued to demonstrate the scheme can repay the associated borrowing within a period of not more than 30 years.

37. 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.

38. Minutes of the meeting of the Rosherville Shareholder Advisory Board held on Thursday, 25 July 2024

The Cabinet noted the minutes of the Rosherville Shareholder Advisory Board held on Thursday, 25 July 2024.

39. Minutes of meeting of Northfleet Harbourside Steering Group held on Monday, 29 July 2024

The Cabinet noted the minutes of the Northfleet Harbourside Steering Group held on Monday, 29 July 2024.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.22 pm.

Finance and Audit Committee

Tuesday, 17 September 2024

7.30pm

Present:

Cllr Gavin Larkins (Chair)
Cllr Ektaveen Thandi (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Helen Ashenden
 Derek Ashenden
 Lee Croxton
 Aaron Elliot
 Jo Hart
 Alan Metcalf
 Jenny Wallace

Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Pat Knight	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Alex Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer)
Andrew Barnett	Principal Accountant (General Fund)
James Larkin	Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service (Chief Audit Executive)
Jasmine Kemp	Grant Thornton, Public Sector Audit Manager
Chloe Taylor	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

17. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Samir Jassal. Cllr Alan Metcalf substituted respectively.

18. Minutes

The minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 16 July 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

19. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

20. Action to tackle the Local Audit Backlog in England

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) presented members of the committee with a report that provided an update on the Government's planned action to tackle the Local Audit Backlog in England. Members were advised of the intended approach expected to be taken in respect of the backstop. The following key points were raised:

- As previously advised to the committee in February 2024, the then government consulted on a proposal to introduce a series of statutory backstops to bring the local audit system back on track. Progress for developing this roadmap to clearing the backlog was paused due to the general election.

- Despite the pause, the council worked to draft two statements of accounts that were outstanding due to the prolonged process to finalise technical accounting issues relating to the 2019/20 accounts.
- The 2020-21 draft accounts were published on Thursday 18 April 2024 and the 2021-22 draft accounts were published on Wednesday 21 August 2024.
- Work had commenced on the 2022-23 accounts and officers have continued to liaise with the external auditors on the account processes for the 2023-24 accounts.
- On Tuesday 30 July 2024, the new Minister of State for Housing Communities and Local Governments wrote to all councils stating his intentions to tackle the local backlog for the past, current and future years – the letter was included within the agenda pack at page 19.
- Due to time constraints, auditors were likely to issue disclaimed audit opinions on many accounts as they will not have sufficient time to gain the assurance necessary to give an audit opinion.
- The Minister recognised that councils should not be judged unfairly.
- Auditors were expected to clearly set out the reasons for disclaimed opinions to mitigate any potential reputational risks.
- The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) regulations 2024 were laid before parliament on Monday 9 September 2024 which confirmed the backstop dates. The regulations were due to come into force at the end of September 2024.
- Grant Thornton had confirmed the approach they were going to take in respect of the backstop and how it would affect the council.
- The initial backstop date will be Friday 13 December 2024 for all years up to 2022-23. An extraordinary meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 10 December 2024.
- The backstop date for 2023-24 was originally proposed at the end of the May 2025, however, was brought forward to 28 February 2025. The original plan was for the council to publish the draft accounts in February 2025, with the external auditors looking to complete their work by April 2025. Regrettably, it was now expected that the council would be unable to publish the accounts in time for the external auditor to complete their audit by Friday 28 February 2025.
- The backstop date for 2024-25 will be Friday 27 February 2026, and the council will be required to publish draft unaudited statements by Monday 30 June 2025.

Following questions and comments from members, the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) explained the following:

- Disclaimers meant that the auditors had not had sufficient time to make an opinion on the accounts themselves.
- There were roughly 600 sets of accounts that were outstanding across local councils – This issue was not unique to Gravesham Borough Council (GBC).

The committee noted the report.

21. Audit Progress Report and Sector Updates - September 2024

The Public Sector Audit Manager (Grant Thronton) provided members with an update on the progress on the work of external audit. The report drew members attention to emerging national issues and developments that may be relevant. The following key points were raised:

- There had been no change in Grant Thorntons intentions with the 2021-23 accounts since what was reported at the last committee meeting.
- At the Finance and Audit Committee meeting on Tuesday 10 December 2024, Grant Thornton would go through the disclaiming on those accounts.
- For the 2023-24 accounts, they had originally had the intention of performing a full audit on that period, but as the backstop date had been brought forward to February 2025, there was not sufficient time for that detailed audit.
- Grant Thornton wanted to provide assurances to the Finance and Audit Committee and to members of the public, specifically in response to some of the risks identified within their audit plan – whilst they will not be performing a full audit it has been agreed with officers to look at the risk assessment and the implementation of design controls and processes by the council to provide the auditors annual report on the value for money arrangements for the authority. This would include specifically looking at The Charter transactions, the new group accounts, and the Aviva transaction that occurred in 2023-24.
- Page 42 included a roadmap of where Grant Thornton wanted to be and for building reassurances in future years.

Following questions and comments from members, the Public Sector Audit Manager (Grant Thornton) explained that:

- Grant Thornton was yet to receive clarity from their regulators, the National Code and the National Audit Office as to the levels of assurance and the actions needed to assess and provide assurance of the opening balances. It was expected that there would be a statutory override where they can place reliance on those balances, but the future cumulative impacts become a challenge –this will be a decision for the government and the regulator.
- An override refers to an override of the standard statutory principles to which the authority's required to operate. It was a way for the government to draw a line to help local authorities and audit firms catch up with outstanding accounts. This would be a temporary measure and not a change in legislation.

The committee noted the report.

22. Finance and Audit Committee - Annual Report

The Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, Cllr Gavin Larkins, provided the committee with a report that provided information on the work of the Finance and Audit Committee during the year 2023/24. Members were asked to endorse the annual report and agree that it be presented at the next full council meeting.

Members of the committee extended their thanks to the officers for their hard work and their guidance.

Resolved that the committee endorsed the annual report as presented at appendix one.

Resolved that the committee agreed for the annual report to be presented at the next full council meeting.

23. General Fund Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 - Quarter One

The Principal Accountant (General Fund) provided the committee with information on the actual performance against the approved revenue and capital budgets for 2024/25, including the projected variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity. The report provided members with other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), or financial statements.

- The Principal Accountant (General Fund) walked members through the executive summary detailed on page 70 of the agenda pack.
- Section 3.5.3 – The £300k inter authority agreement between Kent County Council (KCC) and GBC had come to an end after KCC made the decision not to renew the agreement. This was an income stream the council had for around a decade that included sharing the benefits that derived from reducing the waste stream going into disposal.
- The council were considering their position on this, but for financial prudence, the council has recognised in the MTFP that the income has been lost and could not be relied upon going forward. If there was a change in position, then the MTFP would be updated.
- Thanks were given to the housing team and the finance team for the work on the budget saving initiatives.
- Section 3.5 refers to the optimisation of the councils' assets and using them in the best possible way. This involves reviewing the asset base to ensure it's fit for purpose and generating the best returns. For example, the land recently acquired at Hazell's Farm that will be used for biodiversity net gain and will generate a revenue for the council.
- The indicators at the bottom of page 85 look at revenue streams and the level of council tax and business rates and takes into account the cost of the debt the council had at that point. The budget assumes the level of debt being taken during the course of the year, but at the end of the quarter one, a certain amount of debt has not been taken on at that point so the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream is less than what was expected when the budget was set.

The committee noted the report.

24. Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring Report - Quarter One 2024/25

The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) presented the committee with a report that updated members on the actual performance against the approved revenue and capital budgets for 2024/25, including known variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity. It also updated the committee on other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, HRA Business Plan or Financial Statements.

- The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) walked members through the executive summary detailed on page 92 of the agenda pack.
- There was an element within the capital programme for re-roofing that will be done following a program of works.

- Within the staff structure, there will be a number of officers employed to undertake repairs whose salaries were charged within supervision management and repairs and maintenance. Where posts have been vacant due to recruitment challenges, a contractor will be employed to undertake the works due to the level of demand for works and the obligations on the council as a social landlord. The cost for the contractor sits within a different budget line.
- It was the ambition of the housing department to reduce the use of contractors and employ staff. They had created an additional post within the structure, but there was difficulty recruiting staff due to the current employment market.
- The Principal Accountant (Housing and Exchequer) advised she would seek the specifics relating to the materiality and the insurances that may cover costs at Galley Hill.

The committee noted the report.

25. Internal Audit Update Report

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service (Chief Audit Executive) provided the committee with an update on the work, output and performance of the Internal Audit Team for the period 1 April 2024 – 31 July 2024. The following key points were raised:

- Full details of the reviews from 2023-24 that had been finalised since the last report to the Committee, and progress against the 2024-25 plan, were detailed in the tables at section 5, starting on page 116.
- Progress against the agreed plan was limited with only 5% delivered and a further 9% underway as of 31 July, which was reflective of the resource impacts that have been experienced.
- IA9a, which related to the proportion of agreed assurance assignments delivered was now 14%.
- IA9b, which related to the proportion of agreed assurance assignments underway was now 5%.
- There were two actions more than six months overdue at the end of July, however, one had since been completed.

The committee noted the report.

26. Counter Fraud Update Report

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service (Chief Audit Executive) presented the committee with an update on the work, output and performance of the counter fraud team for the period 1 April 2024 – 31 July 2024. The following key points were raised:

- For Fraud Awareness & prevention training, sessions were available for staff on a monthly basis but only one had gone ahead due to lack of sign up for the other sessions. There had however been service specific training within Housing.
- In terms of pro-active Counter Fraud activity, the NFI exercises remained up to date, with the data submissions for the next exercise happening in October 2024.
- Approximately 91 investigations were concluded in the reporting period with associated cashable savings of £99,281.

The committee noted the report.

27. Internal Audit Plan (Q3-Q4) 2024-25

The Head of Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service (Chief Audit Executive) presented the Internal Audit Plan (Q3-Q4) 2024-25 for approval. The following key points were raised:

- The risk assessment was refreshed in July, along with updates to the level of resource expected to be available.
- Overall, the number of reviews predicted to be undertaken during the year had remained unchanged, with resource losses addressed through the removal of allowances for other work to ensure there was a focus on assurance activity, and the plan itself continued to be focused on the highest areas of risk to provide the necessary assurance to the council.

Resolved that the committee approved the internal audit plan (Q3-Q4) 2024-25 for Gravesham as presented at appendix 2.

28. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2023-24

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) presented the committee with a copy of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter, and raised the following key points:

- Members were advised that there was a typo on page 148, which read 31 March 2023, but should have said 31 March 2024.
- The ombudsman received a total of 12 complaints: 5 in relation to housing, 3 in relation to planning, 2 for environmental services and 2 for benefits and council tax.
- 11 of the 12 complaints were decided within the same year and the outstanding complaint will be included within their report for the current financial year.
- 5 of the 11 complaints were put back to the council to be dealt with through the council's own complaints procedure. Another 5 were closed due to there being no reason for the ombudsman to investigate i.e. they related to services outside of their jurisdiction or they were older than 12 months.
- 1 complaint was investigated and related to how the council dealt with anti-social behaviour – appendix three details the actions taken by the council to put matters right and to ensure this did not happen again.
- As a result of only one complaint being investigated and upheld, the ombudsman published a 100% upheld rate. It was noted that if another authority had more complaints, but some were not upheld, they could end up with a lower percentage. However, the council has the equivalent of 0.9 cases of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents as opposed to the national average of 1.2

Following questions and comments from members, the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) explained that:

- They would seek to clarify the number of complaints received across the country and feed this back to the committee. Since the Meeting it has been identified that the last Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report was in December 2023 for the period April 2022 – March 2023. They dealt with 16,963 cases. Of the 4,301

complaints in which it carried out a detailed investigation, the Ombudsman upheld 74% (3,203 in number).

- They could consider an indicator for an acceptable standard for upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. However, there was already a performance indicator around corporate complaints that sat within the Leader's portfolio and would have been included within the Cabinet papers.
- There was no process cost to the council when complaints were referred to the ombudsman.

The committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.21pm

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Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 19 September 2024

19.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Jordan Meade (Chair)
Cllr Lee Croxton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Helen Ashenden
Derek Ashenden
David Beattie
Gurdip Ram Bungar
Gavin Larkins
Tony Rana
Ektaveen Thandi

Sarah Parfitt Director (Corporate Services)
Ben Clarke Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

37. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllrs Leslie Hills and Emma Elliott; Cllrs Derek Ashenden and David Beattie attended as their respective substitutes.

38. Minutes

The minutes of the Overview Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 25 March 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

39. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

40. Call ins

Item called-in from the Cabinet meeting of 09 September 2024: Item 11, Climate Change Update

The Chair explained that the above item was considered at Cabinet on 09 September 2024 and that it had been called-in in order for the Committee: -

- to better understand and explore the challenges that the Council faces in decarbonising its own operations
- to assess if the strategy is delivering value for money
- to consider the viability of the strategy continuing against the backdrop of savings required to balance the next budget

The Director (Corporate Services) advised that the report asked Cabinet to reflect on the delivery of the council's Climate Change Strategy thus far and allow consideration of the

future strategic direction of the council's climate action given the changes to national policy, the economic situation of the county and the council's financial position since the council adopted the Strategy in December 2020.

The written decision of the Cabinet was as follows: -

Resolved that Cabinet Members acknowledge the report and agree to commence the development of a new Climate Change Strategy for the Council.

The Director (Corporate Services) further explained that the report gave the Cabinet an opportunity to refocus the Council's activity around climate change; back in 2019 the Council adopted a pledge to work towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030 which was followed up with a climate strategy that focused on three key areas:

- Priority 1 – Gravesham Borough Council – the organisation
- Priority 2 – Gravesham Borough Council the housing provider
- Priority 3 – Gravesham Borough Council the community leader

Over the last five years, the country had been through significant changes, and it gave an opportunity for the Council to pause and reflect on what had been achieved over the last five years. Those achievements had been presented to Full Council and the public through annual reports submitted to the Climate Change Advisory Board. In addition, it also gave an opportunity to review whether the Council was using its limited resources in the most effective way to deliver the most benefit to the Borough.

In light of the outcomes of those reflections, at the previous Cabinet meeting, Members agreed to a refocus and redrafting of the Climate Change Strategy. This was done to focus on the Council's role as a place shaper and leader in terms of how the Council would assist the public and local businesses in delivering wider climate change to the Borough.

The Chair thanked the Director (Corporate Services) for her presentation and reiterated his reasons for calling in the decision.

The Director (Corporate Services) fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The initial £500K climate exchange reserve was set up to provide seed funding to support climate change initiatives and it brought forward projects such as 'recycling the go', installation of EV chargers in Council owned car parks and match funding for other projects. The Council had delivered many successful projects with £381K of that reserve still remaining. The Council had been successful in bids for government funding in relation to social housing decarbonisation and using existing council resources, those within the Housing Capital Programme in particular as well as some of the operational activities of the Council. The Committee queried if the £381K would be retained in the reserve and if it would be decreased or increased in the future. The Director (Corporate Services) advised that the Council, as part of the development for the new Strategy, would review if the reserve was still fit for purpose and upon conclusion of that review there may be a shift in how the reserve and its amount would be used in the future
- The Chair stated that the Council was marked 43 out of 181 district authorities in 2021/22 in terms of climate change strategies and how Gravesham's action plan compared to other local authorities and he requested an update on the results of the 2022/23 scorecard rankings. The Director (Corporate Services) explained that

Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) was a voluntary body that conducted desktop reviews of what was available on the Councils website rather than what the Council was actually doing. Between 2021 and 2023, CEUK changed the targets in the criteria for assessment and updated scoring to include areas that were the responsibility of the County, not the Borough. Due to those changes, the scorecards for 2022/23 could not be compared fairly to previous scorecards; additionally Members should be aware of how that information was gathered and assessed, as there were several areas that officers felt the Councils actual position was not fully reflected in those scores. The Director (Corporate Services) advised that she did not have the 2022/23 rankings to hand although the information had been submitted to the Climate Change Advisory Board and was available in the public domain. The Director (Corporate Services) agreed to circulate the information to Members outside of the meeting. The Council would continue to publish CEUK's work on the Councils website when it was available, and it would be used to assist in research for the future strategy; the aforementioned issues with their assessment would need to be factored in

- In 2019, there was an expectation that the Government would recognise the significance of the decarbonisation of the housing stock, it was still a policy of the current Government, and provide further funding to deliver against that policy. Some funding had been delivered but it had been on a bidding only basis which was not guaranteed. A portion of the decarbonisation work had been delivered successfully through the normal Capital Work programme as it delivered financial benefits to both the Council and the tenants such as reduced heating costs and thermal comfort improvements. The £127 million cost attributed to decarbonisation had increased but that figure was not known in 2019; the report to Cabinet enabled the Council to refocus and one of the areas that could be considered was increased lobbying arrangements to Government for more funding and working with external partners to do the same
- Installation of solar panels onto Council owned buildings was previously investigated; for the Civic Centre it was advised that there was not enough space on the roof, and it wasn't viable for the Woodvilles due to infrastructure already on the roof. Brookvale was able to accommodate solar panels, and an application for funding would be made to the next round of the next public sector decarbonisation scheme which was expected to be announced imminently. There were already a number of solar panels installed on some of the Councils housing stock, and it was about exploring further opportunities in the future when an opportunity arose
- Procurement arrangements had been reviewed as well as developer obligations and the Council expectations; all suppliers, over a certain figure, were now expected to demonstrate carbon reduction as part of their plans and contribute to reducing the carbon footprint in the Borough. In a number of projects, especially in employment and skills area, the Council was focused on skills that the community needed to bring forward a number of carbon reduction ambitions as those skills were still in development and were in short supply; seeking and developing those skills added to the Councils refocus to a leadership role
- To obtain the carbon literacy qualification, officers needed to complete a two day training process but if officers wanted to be certified then they needed to submit an application where they expressed how they wanted to take their climate change journey forward and influence others. The application would then be reviewed and agreed by a body before any certification was issued. The Council had a number of officers who had complete both stages of the process, but the majority felt that the two day training was sufficient for their roles. The training was targeted towards key officers and Councillors in key positions whereby the training would help them in their

decision making processes. A report was planned to be taken to the Climate Change Advisory Board setting out how the Council would increase staff awareness and showcase how climate change affected their Council roles as well as their personal lives. Initially, the Council paid for the training but then the LGA offered free sessions for officers which was taken advantage of. Local authorities across Kent were all working to develop a training programme which would share future costs and increase networking between officers across the County. The Director (Corporate Services) agreed to circulate how much the Council had spent on carbon literacy training for officers and Members

- The Council's carbon neutral pledge stated that the target was 2030 and within the pledge it stated that the Council would do what it could to help the community lower the emissions of the Borough by that date
- The Director (Corporate Services) acknowledged the Chair's concerns over the Council being a Community Leader but advised that the Council was best placed to liaise with the Community and local businesses and share best practice. The Council would use its role in the Community to share information and implement climate activities which would help increase awareness of what could be accomplished and the benefits that could be shared by the Community
- Since the Strategy was implemented, as agreed five years ago, a letter was sent to Westminster seeking further funding and powers to make the carbon neutral pledge possible. The Council had also been involved in all consultations released on policy design and raising climate change awareness wherever possible. A recent example of the Council driving climate change was engagement with the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), the DSO process and numerous submissions to the LTC; one of the key points made in the submissions was the climate ambition of the Council as well as the climate impact of the LTC to the Borough
- The Director (Corporate Services) agreed to circulate a response outside of the meeting on how much was spent on upgrading the lights in Council buildings to LED and how much was funded from the reserve or from existing maintenance budgets

Following a discussion on climate change emergency and action, the Director (Corporate Services) advised that it was useful to have spirited debate on the subject of climate change and consider all points of view when creating the Strategy and appropriate climate activity. The Director (Corporate Services) acknowledged Members' comments and advised that the Strategy wasn't just about greenhouse emissions, it was about helping the whole Borough. A full debate on the merits of the Strategy and views on the subject of climate change could be had when the Strategy was submitted to Full Council next year

The Chair stated that when the Climate Change Strategy and the carbon neutral pledge were submitted to Full Council five years ago, he led the Conservative Group in opposing the motion put forward and raised concern that a fully costed plan outlining a detailed breakdown of the total costs and what was achievable wasn't in place first. The Chair had asked that a plan be put in place and brought back to Full Council for debate before anything was moved forward and agreed. In addition, the Chair raised that the pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030 exceeded the Government's own pledge of 2050 and was based on the availability of technology that still did not exist in 2024. The Chair stated that his original concerns raised in 2019 were more evident now with the difficulties the climate change strategy and pledge had encountered; the Chair was of the opinion that the Climate Change Strategy should be changed completely rather than evolved. The Chair asked for a detailed explanation of evolution vs change and what the priorities of the new Climate Change Strategy would be.

In response to the Chairs question, the Director (Corporate Services) advised that she could not comment on the evolution of the Strategy as she wasn't at the previous Cabinet meeting where that comment had been made by a Member of the Cabinet. With regards to the carbon neutral pledge, many other local authorities across the Country made similar pledges at that time and were now in the same position as Gravesham reflecting on the actions of the last five years, especially their positions following the pandemic. The Director (Corporate Services) reminded the Committee that in February 2020, the Council had achieved a ten year balanced medium term financial plan and then Covid struck which greatly altered the Councils financial position; the Council was in a very different position now compared to 2019. The areas of focus outlined in section 4.2 of the report focused on leadership and place making and using the powers available to the Council in the best way possible, based on the Councils current financial position.

The Director (Corporate Services) further explained that the Council had learned over the last five years that Climate Change activity did not just have to focus on the benefits to the environment. There were additional benefits that stemmed from the activity that had positive effects on the Council, local businesses and the public in terms of health and wellbeing, creation of new jobs and reduced energy bills etc. As a result, the new Strategy was likely to also consider the co-benefits of the climate change activity and what it meant to Gravesham as a Borough. More importantly, the Strategy would outline how the Council would work with the Boroughs organisations, businesses and local residents to encourage them to take steps to improve the climate and the general quality of life in Gravesham.

The Director (Corporate Services) stated that an indicative timetable for the new Strategy had been drafted; a report confirming Cabinet's decision to review the Strategy would be considered at the Climate Change Advisory Board in October 2024, with consultations being held internally and externally with resident and business surveys to inform on what was included in the Strategy. The draft Strategy is expected to be ready by March and submitted to Full Council in April for Member discussion and consideration.

The Chair asked that during the creation of the new Strategy, consideration be given to the Councils planning policies and whether or not they were fit for purpose in delivering carbon neutrality for the Borough; it was essential to ensure the policies were updated before the Local Plan process was complete.

The Chair stated that there wasn't any proposed recommendation to Cabinet at this stage but looked forward to a debate in the future.

Members noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:27pm.

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Planning Committee

Wednesday, 25 September 2024

7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Lee Croxton (Chair)
Cllr Rajinder Atwal

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Jo Hart
 Gary Harding
 Peter Scollard
 Tony Rana
 Frank Wardle

Note: Councillors: Councillors David Beattie, Gurdip Ram Bungar, John Burden and Jordan Meade were also in attendance.

Shazad Ghani	Head of Planning
Faye Hobbs	Team Leader (Development Management)
Ethan Bonthron	Career Grade Planner (Development Management)
Lisa Fisher	Career Grade Planner (Development Management)
Laura Caiels	Assistant Head of Legal Services
Karen Gingles	Committee Service Officer (Minutes)

19. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Lyn Milner, Cllr Ejaz Aslam and Cllr Samir Jassal. Cllrs Jo Hart, Derek Ashenden and Helen Ashenden attended as their substitutes.

20. To sign the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 12 June 2024 were signed by the Chair.

21. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

22. Planning applications for determination by the Committee

Order of Agenda

The Chair advised he would deal with the planning applications in the following order:

- 20230102 - 145 Whitehill Road (Land at Tesco Express and Whitehill Open Space)
- 20240200 - The Peacock Public House, 78 Peacock Street, Gravesend

23. 20230102 - 145 Whitehill Road (Land at Tesco Express and Whitehill Open Space)

The Committee considered application 20230102 - 145 Whitehill Road (Land at Tesco Express and Whitehill Open Space). The application was for the construction of a new apartment building for 14 units with a cafe (Use Class E) at ground floor level with improvements to the open space and additional parking provision to the side/rear of the existing Tesco store, to provide additional parking spaces for the Café, Tesco Store and the residential units.

The Career Grade Planner outlined key areas of the report:

- Members were shown the block plan which included the enlarged car parking area for 30 car parking spaces, a net increase of 25 spaces.
- The development had been redesigned to improve its overall appearance, reduce height, bulk and massing as well as safeguarding the amenity of neighbouring residents. The proposed building was three stories in height with various pitch roof elements to break up the building's visual bulk.
- It was noted that the east elevation of the building (facing Whitehill Road) was at a reduced height, this was achieved through negotiation with the applicant to lessen the prominence of the building and to fit in better with the surrounding two-story dwelling houses.
- Windows on the south elevation were oblique to mitigate overlooking onto properties above the parade.
- The development would provide 14 new dwellings, offering a mix of unit sizes. All units met minimum local and national residential layout guidelines. The development was not required to contribute to the delivery of affordable housing, as it fell below the thresholds as set out in policy.
- No objections were received from KCC Highways or GBC Highways, subject to conditions set out in the supplementary report.
- Whitehill open space would be improved to offset the loss of open space. The proposals had the support of GBC's parks and open space team. Plans included a children's play park, an outdoor gym, new seating and soft landscaping improvements. The proposal would also increase biodiversity opportunities through planting of native species.
- A SAMMS payment would be secured through a Section 106 legal agreement. Details of this could be seen in the supplementary report.

The Committee heard the views of two registered speakers in favour of the application and had their questions answered:

- Members noted that the proposed play area was flanked by roads and queried whether fencing would be installed to surround the perimeter. The Head of Planning confirmed that would be dealt with via the landscaping conditions.
- The Committee raised concern regarding the south side of the site, where Whitehill Lane met with Valley Drive, which was a busy section of road. The Head of Planning advised that this was not a consideration for the Planning Committee, as it was an existing highway issue, which would need to be dealt with by KCC Highways as a separate matter. This area was also not within the red line boundary of the application. KCC had not raised this as an issue as part of the application.

Members noted the traffic issue had been raised previously with KCC, at a past meeting of the Gravesham Joint Transportation Board and therefore felt it should be a consideration. After some discussion on the matter, the Assistant Head of Legal Services reiterated that as an existing issue, this could not be taken into account on this planning application, only issues that could be caused by the application would be a consideration. The Head of Planning advised Members that KCC had not objected to the application, and that they did not have of any evidence before them which set out that the development would result in highways issues arising.

- Members asked what could be done within the remit of the application, to manage the additional traffic from the construction of the site. The Head of Planning confirmed this would be dealt with under a construction management plan.
- Members were concerned about the potential blind spot at the triangular point of the plan, where Whitehill Lane met Valley Drive and sought clarification on whether any structure may obscure the view. The speaker confirmed no build structure would be built into the corner of the plot, only landscaping as part of the open space improvements. KCC had required that the visibility splays for the junctions were kept clear to standard.
- Members queried the concept behind the design of the flats. The speaker explained that the design of various pitch heights and block sizes were intended to break up the design rather than an obvious block of flats, to achieve the look of individual houses to look more in keeping to the street scene.

The Committee heard the views of a registered speaker against the application and had their questions answered.

The Committee were invited to make further comments:

- Members noted that since the first refusal of an application for this site in 2019, a great deal of work had been carried out with this application, especially in regard to biodiversity.
- There was concern regarding the building causing a potential blind spot for drivers entering Whitehill Lane from Valley Drive. The Head of Planning confirmed the issue of visibility splays was covered in the officer report with a condition to address the matter, therefore this was not a reasonable reason to refuse the application.

- Members raised concern regarding the worsening traffic situation along Whitehill Road, the Parade area on the north side towards Echo Square and the turning for Valley Drive. The Head of Planning read a paragraph from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which stated that *'Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe'*. It was reiterated that KCC had not stated that the impact of the development would be severe or raise an issue in respect of highway safety. The application could therefore not be reused on that basis.

The Chair agreed adding that without clear evidence of transport issues then it would be difficult to defend a refusal on those grounds.

The Committee heard the views of Councillor Jordan Meade.

In response the Head of Planning summarised that:

- As part of the decision making process, it was important to weigh up the evidence and reach a planning balance, considering the wider issues set out in the officer report, including Gravesham's under supply of housing plus giving weight to the various factors set out in the report.
- The concern of the traffic issues was noted, however these had to be considered in light of the evidence before Committee. It was highlighted that the traffic congestion issue was not unique to the area and under the NPPF, the traffic issue was not considered severe.
- In response to comments regarding the play area, this was covered by conditions within the report. For example, the request to have a fence around the perimeter of the play area could be included within the delegated decision.
- In regard to concern regarding bulk and massing the Head of Planning explained that the officer report had concluded that the design was considered to be acceptable.

Members queried if the application was refused if it could be appealed with the planning inspector then approving the application. The Head of Planning confirmed that if the Committee were minded to refuse, then reasons for this must be given for the decision notice. The applicant would then have the right to appeal Planning Committee's decision and based on what has been said, the planning inspectorate may well approve the application at a later date, opening up the Council to costs, if it was considered the Committee made an unreasonable decision.

The Chair concluded by reminding Members that if they were to refuse the application there needed to be very good grounds, especially in light of the current housing situation. Strong reasons for refusal were also important for defence in an appeal situation.

RESOLVED that the application be **DELEGATED** to the Head of Planning to grant **PERMISSION** subject to agreeing pre-commencement conditions, the finalisation of planning conditions and completion of S106 legal agreement.

Note: Matthew Wood (on behalf of the applicant) and Mr Breley (Breley Designs) spoke in favour of the application. Sharon Gordon (local resident) spoke against the application.

24. 20240200 - The Peacock Public House, 78 Peacock Street, Gravesend

The Committee were presented with application 20240200 - The Peacock Public House, 78 Peacock Street, Gravesend. The application was for the Conversion of the first and second floor 4-bedroom flat into a 5-bedroom House of Multiple Occupants (HMO).

The Career Grade Planner outlined key areas of the report:

- The entrance to the site was located to the right of the Peacock Public House with the proposed bin store to be located in the courtyard to the front.
- Members were informed of the existing first floor plan and the proposed changes. The changes proposed would reduce the size of the existing lounge area to create a smaller living area, allowing for an additional bedroom to the first floor. There were no proposed internal changes on the second floor and no changes proposed to the external elevations of the property.
- There was no onsite parking provision for the existing 4-bedroom flat and no additional parking for the proposed 5 person HMO in this town centre location. There would however be a cycle store included in the rear courtyard. The HMO residents would be reliant on public transport, active travel and the existing on street parking arrangements.

The Committee heard to views of Cllr John Burden

The Committee were invited to make further comments:

- Members noted it was a shame to lose another public house. The Head of Planning confirmed there was no relationship between the closing of the pub and the HMO application.
- The Chair noted the benefit of having the HMO to provide much needed accommodation in a bid to keep people from sleeping on the street.

The Chair invited comments from non-board Members:

- Clarity was sought to confirm that the application was for the change of use and that the HMO license itself was dealt with separately, which was required for an HMO of 5 or more residents. The Head of Planning confirmed there was a separate regime that dealt with the HMO licensing aspects which fell under the Housing department. The Committee were only to decide if the flat should be converted into a 5 bedroom HMO. Members felt that a number of objections to the proposal, set out in the report, would be addressed under the HMO license once applied for and were not material planning concerns.
- Members felt the HMO was a positive move to offer much needed accommodation in the town centre.

RESOLVED that Planning **PERMISSION** be granted, subject to conditions as set out within this report.

25. Planning applications determined under delegated powers by the Director (Environment)

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

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:28pm

Cabinet**Monday, 30 September 2024****7.30pm****Present:**

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

Councillors: Deborah Croxton
 Emma Morley
 Karina O'Malley

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Tom Reynolds	Director (Environment)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Chloe Taylor	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

40. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi.

41. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Tuesday, 09 September 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

42. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

43. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

44. Arts Council England Place Partnership Funding Bid

The Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive presented Cabinet with a report that outlined the details of the Arts Council England's Place Partnership funding opportunity and to seek the approval to submit a full application based on the proposals set out in the report.

The Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive advised the council had been invited by Arts Council England to submit a bid for a place partnership. This was a single pot of funding that would be allocated to a borough or a sensible geographical area - neighbouring areas, such as Medway have previously received the funding.

It was proposed that the bid be for a sum of £382,500, and whilst the bid did range up to £1m, further discussions with Arts Council England led to it feeling as though this figure was the right level for GBC. This would support a large programme of community events, such as The Fringe Festival and the Lights Festival. Currently, such events were funded by Arts Council England on an ad-hoc basis using a pot that all organisations were bidding for. This pot had diminished in recent years and the demand for the fund had increased, with the last two bids submitted by GBC having been unsuccessful.

The Place Partnership would allow the council to have a flexible pot over a three-year period that could support a range of uses and would allow the council to raise its profile as an arts and culture destination and to support the arts and culture strategy in its delivery of a vibrant and aspirational arts and cultural events programme. The council would be providing some match funding towards the programme which would come from the existing arts and culture budget already committed to such activities. As per the terms of the funding, the council would need to establish a consortium of partners that would lead the project in the form of an advisory group chaired by the portfolio holder – with all funding would be subject to GBC approval.

The portfolio holder for Community and Leisure noted that this funding would allow for additional events to be developed and will raise the council's profile. The place partnership approach would directly support the objectives within the corporate plan.

This project would be led by the council – at this stage, it had not been agreed who the members of the advisory group would be. There were various models that could be considered, and they would be explored with the Head of Arts and Culture to understand who the appropriate bodies would be to sit on that group. This would be developed alongside the process of submitting the bid. The Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive was of the view that it should represent bodies funding or delivering activities across the borough.

Resolved that Cabinet:

1. Give approval to submit a funding bid application for £382,500 to Arts Council England to develop a Place Partnership project as set out in this report and subject to:
 - a) The portfolio cabinet member taking the position of Chair of the Cultural Compact
 - b) Gravesham Borough Council branding to continue to be used
 - c) The arts and cultural team continuing to deliver as they currently do
2. Approved match funding of £67,500 over the 4 years of the project (£16,875 per annum) from existing budgets.

45. St Andrew's Gardens Improvement works

The Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive presented Cabinet with an update on the proposed hard and soft improvement works to St Andrew's Gardens, and to seek delegated authority for the Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive to procure an appropriate contractor.

The proposal was looking to spend £260,540 that the council received through section 106 funding from the charter development to relandscape the upper part of St Andrew's Gardens. Some of the key elements the council want to achieve through this project include creating a comfortable open space for the community, and to design out the current concerns around anti-social behaviour within that area. The tender for this project was due to go live within the week. The Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive flagged that they were unsure as to whether the section 106 funding was sufficient funding for the procurement process. However, they would be putting the figure into the public domain meaning those who bid would need to meet that funding level.

The council had been speaking with Lower Thames Crossing about potential funding for the town centre that may also support some of the works that were planned at St Andrew's Gardens. The funding would need to be spent in year, and as such, meant that they would need to move quickly – however, the funding had not yet been confirmed.

It was agreed that an additional recommendation be added that states if additional funding did become available, then the previously discussed and approved phases of the St Andrew's Gardens project would be implemented.

Resolved that, subject to the above:

- (1) Approved expenditure of £260,540 section 106 funding for the works as set out within the report.
- (2) Approved Delegated Authority to the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Communities and Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Operational Services, to contract an appropriate company to deliver to scheme.
- (3) Approved Delegated Authority to the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Communities and Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Operational Services, to deliver further works to St Andrew's Gardens, should further funding be made available by third parties.

46. St George's Centre

The Director (Communities & Inclusive Growth) & Deputy Chief Executive presented Cabinet with an update on the work to increase revenue, reduce landlord liabilities and to introduce a range of new uses and activation activity at the St George's Centre.

The St George's Shopping Centre was a key asset, owned by the council, that had its challenges, particularly throughout the covid period. Over the recent period, the council has focused on two areas: revitalising the town centre and to increase revenue. In terms of revitalisation, there was a new centre manager in place, who had brought forward creative ideas to animate the space. Over 1000 children had visited the pop-up beach over the summer and the artist pop-up space as well as the skate space had been well received.

Some of the more permanent repurposing of four units within the centre include a co-working space to create a community/business hub. This would be open to small businesses and community groups. Initial conversations with the potential operator for the site had been positive and they were hoping to be on site within the next month to understand how the space will be used.

In terms of revenue, the centre was almost at full capacity and the council were looking to reduce landlord responsibilities meaning that the liabilities will reduce on long-term empty units where the council currently play business rates and services charges.

The council were also looking at underutilised space as it was felt there was underused spaces particularly the user deck. There were ideas that were being looked at if the levelling up funding money was forthcoming.

Cabinet discussed the pathway from St George's, down to the pier and through to St Andrews, and noted the need for a clearer access route, and considered options for promoting the route.

A discussion took place regarding the wider town centre activities. The Communications Manager had been working hard to spread the message on Town Centre Grants that had recently been launched. The Town Pier was open again with the council working with Thames Clipper to offer the café and the arts and culture offer on a pop-up basis (Thursdays – Sundays).

The committee noted the report.

47. Minutes of meeting of Gravesham Joint Transportation Board

The minutes of the Gravesham Joint Transportation Board held on Wednesday 28 August 2024 were agreed.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.11pm

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Finance and Audit Committee / Full Council

Date: 17 September 2024 / 15 October 2024

Report of: Cllr Gavin Larkins – Chair, Finance and Audit Committee

Subject: Finance and Audit Committee - Annual Report

Purpose and summary of report:

This report provides information on the work of the Finance and Audit Committee during the year 2023/24.

Recommendations:

- The Finance & Audit Committee endorse the Annual Report presented at Appendix 1.
- The Finance & Audit Committee agree that the Annual Report be presented to the next Full Council meeting.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	There are no specific legal matters arising from this report.
Finance and Value for Money	There are no specific Finance matters arising from this report
Corporate Plan	<p>One Council: a well-run and innovative authority, defined by its skilled and valued workforce, committed to developing its local social impact.</p> <p>Financial responsibility: a financially sustainable authority, driven by a strong Medium Term Financial Strategy, enforced by a suite of effective financial monitoring controls.</p> <p>Robust standards: a comprehensive, timely and benchmarked framework of performance management delivered by services built on corporate principles and sound internal controls.</p> <p>Corporate Compliance: a responsible organisation, ensuring all constitutional, policy and legislative demands are met, and proactive risk management practices adopted.</p>
Climate Change	No implications

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Finance and Audit Committee is responsible for discharging the functions conferred by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The key responsibilities include approving the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts, approving the Annual Governance Statement, approving the Annual Internal Audit Plan and monitoring and reviewing the work of Internal Audit, and reviewing the arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.2 Complementing good governance arrangements, as Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee I have prepared an annual report, highlighting the work of the Committee during 2023/24. This is shown at appendix 1.

2. Appendices

- 2.1 Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee

3. Background Documents

- 3.1 There are no background documents

Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	Not Applicable
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><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> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links. No</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? Not Applicable</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk. Not Applicable</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<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. Not Applicable</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. Not Applicable</p> <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></p>
Crime and Disorder	Not Applicable
Digital and website implications	Not Applicable
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	Not Applicable

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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE
FINANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE 2023/24**

FOREWORD

I am pleased to provide an annual report to Cabinet regarding the work of the Finance and Audit Committee, which details the achievements of the Committee in 2023/24. Alongside its standing agenda, the Committee also held an exceptional meeting to review the 2019/2020 accounts in detail (supported by officers and our auditors Grant Thornton) and were happy to recommend the signing of the accounts and see work beginning on subsequent periods. Against a challenging backdrop in the wider external audit environment the Committee are comforted that a robust plan is in place to address the outstanding years' accounts.

It is clear from the material considered over the last year that the Committee has received significant support and guidance from all officers, in particular within the Finance, Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Teams for not only managing the finances of the borough but also providing and presenting complex information in an accessible way for members and the public to understand the authority's financial situation which helped, and will help, the Committee in its scrutiny of the authority's finance and governance arrangements. I would like to extend my personal thanks and that of the Committee to all those who presented to the Committee this year displaying the professionalism we have come to expect from officers and our external partners.

The remit of the Finance and Audit Committee covers the following aspects:-

- Receiving and considering the content of reports from Internal Audit
- Receiving and considering reports from the council's External Auditor
- Ensuring that management teams take appropriate actions to implement the recommendations contained in these reports
- Scrutiny of specific Service Groups to ensure that audit requirements and recommendations are being met
- Receiving reports on risk management and governance issues
- Having responsibility for ensuring that the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement present a fair and accurate position of the council
- Having regard for the Annual Audit Letter provided by the council's External Auditor.

The reports that have been scrutinised over the last twelve months include:

- Council's Fraud Detection Activity
- Reports from Internal Audit
- Strategic risk register
- Annual Governance Statement
- Financial matters including updating on, and responding to, the audit backlog and annual Statements of Account.
- Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code

We will continue to highlight the role and purpose of The Finance and Audit Committee across the authority and ensure we hold ourselves to the highest standards in the role we play in managing the risks facing the Council.

We will continue to value our relationship with our internal and external auditors; we will also continue to ensure that all recommendations in relation to audit reviews are implemented in a timely manner.

As pressure grows on the council finances, demand on services increases and uncertainty persists in the wider environment, I look forward to leading this critical Committee with the help of all members.

Councillor Gavin Larkins
Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee 2023/24

1. Work of the Finance and Audit Committee during 2023/24

- 1.1. In line with its Terms of Reference, which can be found at the end of this report, the Finance and Audit Committee has met six times during the course of the last year. Details of the range of issues considered by the Committee over the course of the year are set out in the tables below:-

Internal Audit and Counter Fraud

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item
5 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme • Internal Audit Plan 2024-25 (Q1-Q2) • Counter Fraud Plan 2024-25 (Q1-Q2)
12 February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Update Q3 • Counter Fraud Update Q3 • Internal Audit Charter Review 2024-25 • Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Strategy 2020-24 - Review of Progress 2023-24
8 November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Update Q2 • Red Opinion Audit Report • Counter Fraud Update Q2 • National Fraud Annual Progress Update
19 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Update Q1 • Counter Fraud Update Q1 • Internal Audit Plan (Q3-Q4) 2023-24
18 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit - External Quality Assessment • Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Survey Results • Internal Audit Annual Report • Counter Fraud Annual Report

Governance and Risk

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item
5 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Risk (including Risk Register 2024-25 and Corporate Risk Strategy 2024-25) • CIPFA Financial Management Code
21 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addendum to Annual Governance Statement 2019-20
8 November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Risk Register, Mid – year review
19 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2022-23
18 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement 2022-23 • Annual Report of the Audit Committee Chair

Accounts and External Audit

5 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Accounting Policies 2023-24 • External Audit Update from Grant Thornton • Consultation – Addressing the local audit backlog in England
12 February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasury Management Strategy & Capital Strategy 2024-25 • General Fund Monitoring Report Q3 2023-24 • Housing Revenue Account Budget monitoring Q3 2023-24
21 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated Audit Findings Report for Year End 31 March 2020 • Statement of Accounts 2019-20 & Letter of Representation 2019-20
8 November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Fund Budget Monitoring Report 2023-24 Q2 • Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring 2023-24 Q2 • Treasury Management, Mid-Year Review

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Findings Report 2019-20 • Value for Money Report 2019-20
19 September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Fund Budget Monitoring 2023-24 Q1 • Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring 2023-24 Q1 • Learning from Local Government Interventions • External Audit Progress report & Sector Update
18 July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Fund Provisional Outturn • Housing Revenue Account Provisional Outturn • Annual Treasury Management Review 2022-23

3. Other items to note

3.1 The backlog of audited accounts of local bodies in England peaked on 30 September 2023 at 918. As of 31 December 2023, this then stood at 771 outstanding audit opinions across local government spanning a number of years. There have been a variety of reasons for this backlog which include lack external audit resource, disruption as a result of the COVID-Pandemic, increasing complexity in local authority accounts and increased regulation by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC). There remain ongoing discussions between FRC and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) concerning a backstop deadline at which point all accounts up to and including 2023/23 would need to be finalised.

3.2 Updates from officers on the current audit position were shared with the Chair and the Finance & Audit Committee throughout the year as were updates provided by the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton LLP. The accounts for 2019/20 were signed off and published. This has enabled an outline timeframe to draft the 2020/21; 2021/22; 2022/23 and 2023/24 statement of accounts. The Finance and Audit Committee maintains and will continue its constructive dialogue and effective working arrangements with the external auditors into 2024/25.

3.3 Member attendance of the Committee during the past year is shown in the table at the end of this report.

3.4 The work of the Committee has had a positive impact and contributes to the overall internal control environment within the Council which feeds into the Annual Governance Statement. The Committee has continued its excellent working relationships with officers and External Audit. The Committee will continue to develop and improve its understanding of the many technical issues presented to it during 2023/24 and in future years.

**Gravesham Borough Council
Finance & Audit Committee – Terms of Reference
(as set out in Annex 1.2 of the Constitution)**

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of the Finance & Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management and internal control environment of the Council, independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance and oversight of financial reporting processes.

Budget and Financial Control

1. To monitor the overall state of the Council's finances on at least a quarterly basis and advise the Cabinet on any action it recommends.
2. To consider the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and prudential indicators prior to the start of the financial year and adoption by the Full Council. To receive at least an in-year and annual report on treasury management activity and to comment on any amendments or updates to the strategic treasury management framework during the course of the year.

Annual Financial Statements

3. To review the annual accounting policies to be used in preparing the annual statement of accounts.
4. To review the response to the External Audit Letter to those charged with Governance prior to sign off by the Chair of the Committee.
5. To receive the audit findings report, annual audit letter and management's response to any audit finding and recommendations.
6. To consider and approve the Council's statement of accounts each year.

External Audit

7. To inform the appointment of the External Auditor undertaken by Full Council.
8. To review with management the annual audit fee letter and annual audit plan and to ensure that the provision of non-audit services does not impair the external auditor's independence or objectivity.

Internal Control, Risk Management and Internal Audit

9. To review the effectiveness of the council's internal control framework, including the review and approval of the Annual Governance Statement.
10. To inform the risk assessment process used to develop the Risk Management Strategy and Corporate Risk Register for the Council.
11. To monitor the effective development & operation of risk management in the authority.
12. To monitor and review the performance of internal audit, the effectiveness of the internal audit and counter fraud function, the internal audit programme and internal audit findings, including the effectiveness of management's response to any recommendations made.
13. To consider the summary findings of internal audit reports given an opinion of Red, where the Chief Audit Executive (in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and/or Monitoring Officer as applicable and the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee) considers the weaknesses identified to exceed a financial threshold of £25,000, or

where they represent a significant risk to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Objectives.

14. To seek such assurance as it may deem appropriate that the internal audit function is independent, adequately resourced and has appropriate standing within the Council.
15. To receive the annual opinion from the Chief Audit Executive.
16. To consider and make recommendations on reports to the Council by Internal Audit, External Audit, other external inspectorates and the Local Government Ombudsman.

Finance and Audit Committee Attendance 2023/24

Date of Meeting/Member Present	18 July 2023	19 September 2023	8 November 2023	21 December 2023	12 February 2024	5 March 2024
Cllr Gavin Larkins (Chair)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Ektaveen Thandi (Vice-Chair)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Derek Ashenden		√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Lee Croxton	√	√	√		√	√
Cllr Dakota Dibben	√	√	√			
Cllr Aaron Elliott	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Jo Hart	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Samir Jassal		√		√	√	
Cllr Karina O'Malley	√	√	√	√	√	√
Cllr Helen Ashenden				√ (substitute for Cllr D. Dibben)	√ (substitute for Cllr D. Dibben)	√ (substitute for Cllr D. Dibben)
Cllr David Beattie						√ (substitute for Cllr S. Jassal)
Cllr Alan Metcalf	√ (substitute for Cllr S. Jassal)		√ (substitute for Cllr S. Jassal)			
Cllr Ben Sizer	√ (substitute for Cllr D Ashenden)					

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Changes to Committee Memberships September 2024 (for information only)

Following the outcome of the General Election held on 4 July 2024, Councillor Lauren Sullivan officially resigned from her role as Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure with Councillor Deborah Croxton being appointed to that position. This change resulted in a number of changes needing to be made to Committee Memberships, therefore, both political parties accordingly made changes via a delegated decision taken by the Chief Executive of the Council on 9 September 2024 (the following link will take you to the decision notice [Document Changes to Committee Memberships \(September 2024\) – Gravesham Borough Council](#)).

Changes to Committee Memberships is a decision reserved to Full Council, however, as the next meeting of Full Council was not until 15 October 2024, the urgency provisions of the Constitution were evoked allowing the Chief Executive to make those changes with an information only report being presented to the next meeting of Full Council.

The decision was taken in consultation with both Group Leaders.

Set out below are those changes which took effect from 9 September 2024:-

Changes to Labour Group Committee Memberships - September 2024

Cllr Lauren Sullivan

To be taken off Appointments Board

To be taken off Ebbsfleet UDC Board Planning Committee (Substitute)

Previously resigned as Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Previously resigned as Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee (Chair)

Cllr Deborah Croxton

To be appointed as Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure (from Monday 9 September 2024)

Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee (Chair)

To be appointed to Appointments Board

To be taken off Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

To be taken off Overview Scrutiny Committee (Vice-Chair)

To be taken off Planning Committee

Other committee changes

Cllr Christina Rolles to be appointed Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Ektaveen Thandi to be appointed Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Cllr Gavin Larkins to be appointed Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Lee Croxton to be appointed to Overview Scrutiny Committee (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Gurdip Ram Bungar to be appointed to Overview Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Tony Rana to be appointed to Planning Committee

Cllr Rajinder Atwal to be appointed to Ebbsfleet UDC Board Planning Committee (Substitute)

Changes to Conservative Group Committee Membership - September 2024

Cllr Frank Wardle to replace Cllr Alan Metcalf on Planning Committee