

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.