

Cabinet

Monday, 6 June 2016

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Cubitt (Chair)

Councillors: Gurjit Kaur Bains
Julia Burgoyne
Sandra Garside
Samir Jassal
Jordan Meade
Alan Ridgers
Anthony Pritchard

Note: Councillors: John Burden, John Caller, Susan Howes, David Hurley, Lenny Rolles, Brian Sangha, Makhan Singh, Narinder Singh Thandi and Steve Thompson were also in attendance

Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Sarah Parfitt	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Wale Adetoro	Assistant Director (Housing)
Jackie Baker	Assistant Manager, Revenues & Benefits
Glen Pritchard	Assistant Manager (Local Taxation)
Sue Hills	Committee & Elections Manager

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Leslie Hills, David Turner and officers David Hughes, Kevin Burbidge and Nick Brown.

2. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held in March 2016 were signed by the Chair.

3. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

4. Scrutiny Topic Review Reports - Housing Repairs & Planning Applications

Cabinet was presented with a report that detailed the outcome of the two reviews undertaken into the Housing Repairs and Planning Applications services.

The housing review had identified improvements that could be made to the repairs process, particularly with regard to fencing but also confirmed that the council is achieving best value for money.

The planning review had concentrated on three work streams involving regular performance information; examination of key headlines identified as part of the service review and understanding the Government's thrust for change and the impact this may have on the Council.

Resolved that the recommendations of the Overview Scrutiny Committee in respect of Housing Repairs and Planning Applications be agreed, and a report on progress be submitted to Cabinet within 12 months.

1. Housing Repairs

- The council should change the way in which it undertakes fencing repairs (not necessarily using fence panels but considering wire fences too).
- A review of the new arrangements including any unintended consequences upon tenants or upon the council's overall expenditure be undertaken in 12 months and a report be submitted to Overview Scrutiny Committee.
- Adequate resources be made available to ensure that the proposed Tenancy audit project is fully supported and that any actions identified as a result of the visits are completed as required.

2. Planning Applications

- The topic review sub-group continue to receive performance updates
- The format of planning reports be updated to provide a one-page summary which is then supported by more detailed information within the report
- The findings of Overview Scrutiny Committee that the provision of hard copy applications to the Parish Councils cease be supported but that parishes be given the option of purchasing copies if they choose to.
- The thoughts of Overview Scrutiny Committee in respect of the consultation where appropriate, be included in the final submission to government on the Implementation of Planning Changes consultation currently in progress.

5. Member Training & Development Plan

All members had received a questionnaire seeking their views on various aspects of member training including timing and information about council services. The responses received showed that members wished to know more about the Council and wanted specific skills training to equip them to carry out their roles and develop their skills.

Cabinet noted that the draft training and development plan took account of all of these issues and allowed for additional briefings/training to take place if the need arose.

Resolved that

1. The member training and development plan set out at appendix 3 be approved
2. The absolute minimum attendance level for training be set at 8 (with the expectation that 10 members should be in attendance at each Training Session)

3. The Leaders of both political groups identify the members whom they feel require specific Media Relations Training and advise them of the opportunity for 1-2-1 training on Social media.

6. Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Four 2015-16

Cabinet was advised of the achievements in respect of the performance measures and performance indicators set out within the council's Corporate Plan 2015-19 for the last quarter of 2015/16.

Members acknowledged the changes made to performance reporting and how all Cabinet Committees will be presented with individual performance reports tailored to their respective portfolios. These reports will not only contain statistical data but will also include performance measures and a series of targets for the year ahead.

7. Budget Monitoring Out-turn Report

Cabinet was updated on the provisional budget out-turn of the Council for 2015/16.

The report summarised the outcomes in relation to the General Fund Revenue Out-Turn; movements in the General Fund working balances reserves; General Fund Capital Outturn; Housing Revenue Account Revenue Out-turn; movements in the Housing Revenue Account working balances and earmarked reserves and the Housing Revenue Account Capital Out-turn.

Areas highlighted included

- Vacancy savings
- The increase in costs of NNDR
- Favourable variances in costs of repairs and maintenance of leisure centres
- A reduction in external audit fees
- Favourable variance in car parks income
- Adverse variances for development control in consultant and legal fees
- Improved interest received on investments
- Increased income from business rates and an £8k favourable variance in New Homes Bonus

8. Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review

Cabinet was updated on the progress made with the review of the Council Tax Reduction scheme and the next steps it was proposed be taken to move it forward.

Although the overall number of applicants to benefit from the scheme since its introduction in 2013 had reduced, the council was still facing an increased costs burden.

The full series of options considered by the Kent-wide local authority group working on the scheme demonstrated why the group had concluded that it would be best to align the scheme with that already in place for Housing Benefit.

Since the council had already assumed increases to the maximum level any suggestion of an increase in Council Tax to improve the position would lead to additional costs because of the requirement to hold a referendum.

Resolved that

1. The work completed on the review of the scheme be noted
2. The broad scheme framework, including the recommendations at paragraph 6 of the report be agreed in readiness for the public consultation and that the Director (Corporate Services) be given delegated authority to finalise the consultation material in liaison with the Leader and Cabinet member for Planning and Administration Committee
3. The draft consultation documents be agreed.

9. Clock Tower Restoration

Cabinet was advised that a successful bid for Heritage Lottery Funding had resulted in a grant of £172,300 being received. When combined with £38,100 from the Council's property maintenance budget (already allocated) and £4,000 from Councillor Cribbon's Members' Community Grant, the total funding available amounted to £215,400.

The scheme which includes both physical and restoration work will also involve community engagement activities once works had been completed an interpretation board will be installed providing information about the history of the clock tower.

Recommended to Council that the Gravesend Clock Tower Restoration Scheme with costs of £215,400 be included in the 2016/2017 Capital Programme.

10. Proposed development of a fully shared Legal Service with Medway Council

Cabinet was advised that following the already successful introduction of a fully shared service for the Audit function between Gravesham and Medway, the opportunity had been taken to look for other possible shared services between the two authorities.

Initial investigatory work had provided information about the working practices at the two authorities and the make-up of the two teams.

Resolved that a full evaluation of a shared Legal Service Team with Medway Council be undertaken and a further report be submitted to Cabinet once this work had been completed.

11. External works to the Civic Centre/Woodville

Cabinet was advised that the tender in respect of the external works to the Civic Centre/Woodville had been opened on 31 May 2016. The successful contractor was expected to start on site on 27 June 2016 and complete the work by mid-October 2016. Amongst other areas the spalled areas of concrete cladding will be replaced; replacement of all the mastic seals between the concrete panels will be replaced; corrosion inhibitors will be

applied to all exposed surfaces of the panels and the external surfaces of all timber windows and doors.

The tender accepted was for £243,734.80.

12. Exclusion

It was agreed that pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the local Government Act 1972, that the public be excluded from any items included in Part B of the agenda because it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted that if members of the public are present during those items, there will be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

13. National Non Domestic Rates - Write Offs

Cabinet was advised of the number and amount of Business Rate debts over £15,000 officers had not been able to collect despite following all possible avenues for collection.

Resolved that officers be authorised to write-off the debts listed in Appendix 2 to the report.

14. Housing Benefit Overpayment - Write Offs

Cabinet was reminded that any debt will only be written-off as a last resort if all avenues of collection have been followed.

Resolved that authority be given to write-off the debt shown in Appendix 2 of the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm