

## Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 20 October 2016

7.30 pm

### Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)  
Cllr David Hurley (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Les Howes  
John Knight  
William Lambert  
Sara Langdale  
Brian Sangha  
Steve Thompson  
Michael Wenban

**Note:** Cllr David Turner (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Cllr Jordan Meade (Cabinet Member for Youth & Tourism) were also in attendance

David Hughes	Chief Executive
Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Nick Brown	Director (Environment & Operations)
Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Environment)
Sarah Parfitt	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Mike Bytheway	Service Manager Revenues & Benefits
Michelle Batstone	Corporate Change Manager
Jackie Baker	Assistant Revenues & Benefits Manager
Alex Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer)
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

### 55. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Lee Croxton, Derek Shelbrooke and Makhan Singh. Cllrs Steve Thompson, John Knight and Brian Sangha attended as their respective substitutes.

### 56. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2016 were signed by the Chair.

### 57. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

## **58. Mid-year review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement**

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) and Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) provided Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to review the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and provide feedback for consideration by officers in either the 2016-17 Mid-Year Review or the 2017-18 Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

The Mid-Year Review of the Treasury Management Strategy will be presented to Finance and Audit Committee on 16 November 2016; this will subsequently be reviewed by Full Council on 6 December 2016.

The 2017-18 Treasury Management Strategy Statement will be considered by Finance and Audit Committee on 7 February 2017 and subsequently by Full Council on 21 February 2017.

Following a question from the Committee, the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) clarified that Members will be notified when a crossover point for the release of funds is on the horizon via the Treasury Management Activity Report that is presented to the Finance & Audit Committee on a half yearly basis.

The Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer) explained that regarding the £10million set aside for Property Acquisitions; the crossover point is 8 years away at the moment.

**Resolved** that the Committee noted the Treasury Management Strategy Statement.

## **59. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18**

The Service Manager Revenues & Benefits and Assistant Revenues & Benefits Manager presented the Committee with detailed results from the recent council tax reduction scheme (CTRS) consultation process and the findings of the second stage equality impact assessment (EQIA).

Members were asked to consider the results of the consultation and the findings of the second stage equality impact assessment (EQIA) to recommend any changes to Cabinet, to take effect from 1 April 2017.

The Service Manager Revenues & Benefits highlighted the following:

- The CTRS review has been undertaken in liaison with all Kent Districts and that we must have regard to reductions in government grant and the financial pressures we face
- The Council has a legal duty to go out to public consultation on this matter.
- The scheme only affects working age households.
- 387 responses were received.
- The majority of responses agreed to options 2-14
- Most groups were represented proportionately, apart from the Indian community but every effort was made to address this.
- 80% of respondents were of working age (18 to 64).

- GBC's collection rate for CTRS recipients has been over 80%. A consultant has advised that the tipping point for there to be an impact on the collection rate could be a minimum payment of 25% towards Council Tax.

Following questions from the Committee, The Service Manager Revenues & Benefits clarified the following:

- The definition of 'Pensioners' in this context is whenever a person reaches state retirement pensionable age.
- The Council has a local scheme that covers the Armed Forces.
- The consultant has reassured the Council that the response rate is in line with good consultation practices.

The Committee looked at each option in turn and provided feedback as detailed below:

#### **Option 1**

**Should the Council continue to reduce Council Tax for eligible claimants in the way it does now?**

#### **Option 1a**

**Do you agree to reducing the maximum level of support to 80%**

The Committee debated Option 1 and Option 1a, noting that Option 1 would mean sticking with the current scheme at 18.5% and Option 1a would mean increasing to 20%.

The Committee voted on the two options resulting in the following outcome:

- The majority of the Committee supported Option 1a - increasing to 20%
- The minority of the Committee supported Option 1 - remaining at 18.5%

#### **Option 1b**

**Do you agree to reducing the maximum level of support to 75%**

The Committee did not agree with this option.

#### **Option 2**

**Do you agree to removing the family premium for all new working age claimants?**

The Committee did not agree with this option and also enquired as to the number of claims it would impact upon.

#### **Option 3**

**Do you agree to reducing backdating of new claims to 1 month?**

The Committee felt that there wasn't enough information, regarding the amount of claimants who have applied for backdating, to make an informed decision. The Cabinet need to be given more information before making a decision.

**Option 4**

**Do you agree to the use of a minimum level of income for self-employed earners after 1 year?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Option 5**

**Do you agree to reducing the period which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Reduction to 4 weeks?**

The Committee felt that there wasn't enough information to make an informed decision on this option. The Cabinet need to be given more information before making a decision.

**Option 6**

**Do you agree to reducing the capital limit from £16,000 to £6,000?**

The Committee did not agree with this option.

**Option 7**

**Do you agree to using a standard level of non-dependant deduction?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Option 8**

**Do you agree to including Child Maintenance as income?**

The Committee felt that more research should be undertaken into the impact of this option before a decision can be made. Therefore the Committee felt it could not support this option

**Option 9**

**Do you agree to including Child Benefit as income?**

The Committee did not agree with this option and felt that this area should be left alone.

**Option 10**

**Do you agree to restricting the maximum level of Council Tax Reduction payable to the equivalent of a Band D charge?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Option 11**

**Do you agree to removing Second Adult Rebate?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Option 12**

**Do you agree to removing the Work Related Activity Component in the calculation for new claimants in receipt of Employment & Support Allowance?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Option 13****Do you agree to restricting the maximum number of dependent children within the assessment of Council Tax Reduction to two?**

The Committee felt that there wasn't enough information to make an informed decision on this option. The Cabinet need to be given more information before making a decision.

**Option 14****Do you agree to introducing a scheme, in addition to the CTRS, to help applicants suffering exceptional hardship?**

The Committee agreed with this option.

**Resolved** that the Committee noted the results of the consultation and the findings of the second stage equality impact assessment (EQIA) and requested that their comments on each of the 14 options are reported to Cabinet.

**60. Scrutiny Topic Review Report - Kingdom Enforcement Contract**

The Corporate Change Manager presented Members with the draft Topic Review report for the Kingdom Enforcement Contract Topic Review for approval and subsequent submission to Cabinet.

The Committee considered the review report and the accompanying recommendation for consideration by Cabinet, as detailed below:

The specification for the tender of the new contract should be expanded to also include services relating to:

- Identification of dog owners, including the use of DNA testing for dog fouling enforcement activities.
- Issuing enforcement tickets for households who put their rubbish out too early.
- An expansion of the patrol areas that are covered by the Enforcement Officers to include other high risk, hot spot areas such as Riverview Park and Perry Street.

The Assistant Director (Environment) clarified the recent confusion in the media regarding Kingdom Enforcement and highlighted the following:

- A certain amount of tickets had been issued in error by Kingdom, this has now been rectified.
- Kingdom now has a number of new managers and their enforcement officers have been retrained.
- The Assistant Director (Environment) is monitoring this situation closely and has set up meetings with Kingdom to ensure a quality service is delivered.

Following questions from Members, the Director (Environment & Operations) and Assistant Director (Environment) highlighted the following:

- The Council is preparing a specification for tender which will be open to other contractors as well as Kingdom.
- In terms of value for money; the Kingdom contract has had a positive impact on the street scene in the town and has delivered a surplus of around £10,000 that is put back in to this area of work.
- Kingdom officers are salary based and do not have a bonus incentive scheme.
- The Assistant Director has put forward suggestions to Kingdom to put back into Kent via litter picking sessions, community days, amnesty days, sponsoring 'Love Kent, Hate Litter' scheme etc.
- The current contract with Kingdom expires at the end of February 2017; the Council will then go ahead with the successful tenderer after that date.

**Resolved** that the Committee approved the recommendations of the Kingdom Enforcement Contract Topic Review and supported their submission to Cabinet for consideration.

#### **61. Service review options for Economic Development and Public Health & Communities - feedback on options Cabinet are minded to take.**

The Director (Corporate Services) explained that reductions to central government funding will create a requirement for the Council's budget to be reduced by £2.5m by 2019/20, of which £1.4m will need to come from the Service Review Process.

It has been calculated that from the 2019-20 financial year, the council will need to save £10,000 per working day (should there be no other changes to income or expenditure) in order to bridge the budget gap. However, implementation of selected options earlier than 2019/20 will have a beneficial impact upon the Council's financial position.

The Overview Scrutiny Committee were presented with the options identified through the Service Review process for Economic Development and Public Health & Communities.

Overview Scrutiny Committee Members were requested to review and discuss the options set out in appendices two and three of the report and in particular, those that the Cabinet have identified that they are minded to progress as set out in appendix four.

The Overview Scrutiny Committee considered each option that the Cabinet, on 10 October 2016, identified that they are minded to progress, and provided feedback as detailed below:

## Economic Development

**1. Cease tourism functions in their present form through cessation of Town Centric and a reduced tourism service be provided at the refurbished market by a combined team of officers delivering revised tourism and revised town centre management functions and, additionally, Arts and Heritage activities given the proximity of the market to many of the main cultural and heritage assets in the town.**

The Deputy Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Tourism & Youth clarified the following points:

- The recommendations made by the Overview Scrutiny Committee in their Gateway/Tourism Review have been taken on board and reflected in Option 1 (above).
- The tourism function could potentially be split; with a presence at both the Civic Centre and the Market.
- As well as a presence in the flexible space in the centre of the market, the tourism function will also be mobile in the form of a Gazebo that will be pitched in key areas/events in and around the Borough (e.g. Cruise Terminal at Tilbury, Riverside Festival etc).

Members of the Committee highlighted the following areas:

- IT systems need be secure in the market i.e. not running on public Wi-Fi.
- Stall holders in the new market should pay upfront for their space.
- Better signage is needed in the Town to promote tourism / key locations.
- A trailer would be better than a Gazebo for flexible/mobile tourism promotion.
- The Service Review process should include a section that considers the impact of each decision on local people and their perception of the council.
- There needs to be more 'flesh on the bones' of the options so they can be considered fully.

The Deputy Leader of the Council advised the Committee that a project is currently underway looking at improved signage in the Town.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that the Committee did not have all the information at this stage. He explained that Cabinet has done the first sieve in this process. Officers have been sent away to 'flesh out' the options and see how they might work in order to deliver the required savings. Once the work has been completed the Committee will be provided with further detail.

The Chief Executive explained that this process started because the Council had the presence of mind that these circumstances were on the horizon. The Council could either wait or get on and develop options on how to deal with it. Some Local Authorities have chosen the option of 'Salami Slicing', Gravesham Borough Council has tried to do a more scientific exercise. Hopefully the officer's work will make the Councillors task easier. There is still fleshing out to be done but this work will stand the Council in good stead by looking at what options are available rather than salami slicing.

The Committee noted Option 1 and requested that further information on the subject be provided to both the Cabinet and the Overview Scrutiny Committee to help inform discussions and decisions.

**2. Cease the use of gatekeepers to secure pedestrianisation of key town centre routes and replace with rising bollards.**

The Committee felt that bollards are an expensive option and that reliability has been a problem elsewhere and the Cabinet require further information on this subject before a decision can be made.

**3. Officers be requested to develop proposals to deliver the actions at 1. and 2. above with the aim of securing an annual reduction of £300,000 in the annual budget for these activities.**

The Committee accepted and agreed Option 3.

**4. Officers be requested to investigate whether it is possible to re-name Gravesend as “Gravesend-Upon-Thames” to highlight its riverside location to potential visitors and the potential cost implications were such a name change to be effected.**

Members of the Committee raised concerns about officer time being spent on this option and felt that their time would be better spent investigating other Service Review options.

The Committee noted Option 4.

### **Public Health & Communities**

**5. Introduce an on-line booking facility for the booking of sports pitches and move Youth Council responsibilities to Committee Section to allow Leisure officers to devote more to time to sports development.**

The Deputy Leader of the Council clarified that he envisaged The Gr@nd running the Youth Council with assistance from the Committee Section. However, the financial aspects and finer details need to be worked through.

The Committee noted Option 5 and noted that more work needs to be done.

**6. Reduce the budgets for Older Persons and Younger Persons by £25,000 each to produce an annual saving of £50,000.**

The Committee noted Option 6 and the reduction in the two budgets.

**7. Move officer support for Neighbourhood Forums to Committee Section and reduce the frequency of meetings from four per annum to two per annum. Reduce the forum grants by 50% to £22,000.**

The Committee noted Option 7.



**8. Reduce expenditure on the Council's programme of events by £50,000 p.a.**

The Deputy Leader of the Council clarified the following points:

- It is envisaged that The Riverside Festival can still be delivered for around £10,000 less than at present.
- Consideration is being given to reducing the Christmas Programme from 2017 onwards; the Christmas light switch on and Christmas Market will remain and the Council may be able to get sponsorship for some events.

The Committee noted Option 8.

**9. Given that the provision of the annual fireworks display was originally at the request of and funded by Kent Fire and Rescue Service in order to reduce the risk of fires and accidents from home bonfires and displays, seek an annual contribution of £15,000 from that Service to future years' displays.**

Members of the Committee questioned whether the Kent Fire and Rescue Service would have the funds to support this option.

A Member of the Committee suggested that the annual firework display did not need accompanying bands at further expense to the Council.

The Deputy Leader noted the band suggestion and explained that a meeting had been set up with Kent Fire and Rescue Service to discuss the matter of funding further.

The Committee noted Option 9.

**10. In liaison with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, officers be requested to discuss with the Gr@nd service delivery options that will assist the Council's budget position.**

The Committee noted Option 10.

**11. Officers be requested to develop proposals to deliver the actions at 5. to 10. above with the aim of securing an annual reduction of £185,000 in the annual budget for these activities.**

The Committee noted Option 11.

The Chair explained that the Committee had noted the majority of the options because further information is needed to make an informed decision.

**Resolved** that the Committee noted the report and options that Cabinet are minded to progress and that its comments on certain potential options be reported to Cabinet.

**Note:** The Deputy Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Youth & Tourism spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item.

**Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm

