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Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 15 June 2017

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Lee Croxton
William Lambert
Sara Langdale
Shane Mochrie-Cox
Derek Shelbrooke
Narinder Singh Thandi
Michael Wenban

Also in attendance: Cllr Julia Burgoyne (Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration) Cllr Sandra Garside (Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure & Arts) and Leslie Hills (Cabinet Member for Performance & Administration)

Kevin Burbidge	Director (Planning & Regeneration)
Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Environment)
Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Sarah Parfitt	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Michelle Batstone	Corporate Change Manager
Adrian Hickmott	Leisure Manager
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

101. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr John Caller and Cllr Makhan Singh; Cllr Narinder Singh Thandi and Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox appeared as their respective substitutes.

102. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2017 were signed by the Chair.

103. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Sara Langdale declared an 'Other Interest' in Item 6. Call in: Fleet Leisure Project Update as she is the Council's representative on Gravesham Community Leisure Limited (GCLL).

104. Service Review Team Options for; Planning and Regeneration, Customer and Theatre and Direct Service Operation (DSO)

The Overview Scrutiny Committee were provided with the detailed information used to support the proposals that the Cabinet were minded to progress from the Service Review process for Planning & Regeneration Services, Customer & Theatre Services and the Direct Services Operation (DSO).

The Committee considered each area in turn before asking questions:

Planning & Regeneration

1. Undertake a thorough review of the Development Management function to include a review of resources, processes, fees charged for pre-application advice, etc. and to also look at the potential for a shared service with regards to the technical/validation team. It is anticipated that the review will enable service efficiencies to be implemented.
2. Review the way in which the Geographical Information System (GIS) is used corporately. The Planning Service uses the GIS system but a more corporate approach to this would aide better and more effective data mapping.
3. Reduce the annual contributions to the Planning Policy reserve. The Planning Policy reserve was established in 2011-12 with an annual contribution of £100,000 and officers are asked to detail if the full level of contribution is required.
4. In the future, undertake a review of the Regeneration and Major Projects Team. It is already known that the Service Manager (Major Regeneration Projects) has a fixed-term contract until October 2019 and it is suggested that this post not be filled once this is met realising a saving in 2019-20. A further review of the team and the key projects underway should also be undertaken as this stage.

It is anticipated that the changes to the Planning and Regeneration function will see the council deliver annual budget savings of £146,000.

Following questions from the Committee; The Director (Housing & Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Planning) highlighted the following:

- Gravesham are commencing talks with Medway regarding the shared technical/validation team because both authorities share a lot of similarities in this field. If it doesn't work out other partners will be considered.
- The Planning department is trying to get qualified planners in and bring on existing talent; there are no plans to reduce staff and the department does its best to retain staff.
- The Planning Policy reserve is a source of money to take you through the Local Plan process. A current reserve of £328,000 has been built up, this is a stable base that GBC can draw down from and add £50,000 per annum (a reduction of £50,000 per annum)

- Currently there are internal skills/staff that can be drawn upon at present with support brought in from outside the council as necessary. Once the Service Manager (Major Regeneration Projects) departs GBC the resourcing needs will be considered in the light of funding and priorities of the day.

Customer & Theatre Services

1. Move more internal services into the contact centre. It is anticipated that this will enable the council to reduce the establishment as digital contacts increase and call volumes decline, and will also allow for greater efficiencies in the delivery of the service in the interim. There should also be consideration of the use of an intelligent IVR telephone system to support the work of the department moving forward.
2. Carry out a review to restructure and potentially reduce the current offer from The Woodville, in line with a renewed strategic direction for the Woodville. This will enable the council to continue to offer the breadth of activities currently in place, retain control of the venue and operations, retain artistic control of the programme offered, whilst delivering an overall saving.

It is anticipated that the changes to the council's Customer & Theatre Services functions will see the council deliver annual budget savings of £49,920 in Customer Services and £61,000 in the Woodville Halls.

Following questions from the Committee; The Director (Communities) and Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) highlighted the following:

- Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) provides a series of messages to guide the customer to appropriate department. Customers also have the option of the Automated System, Gateway officers and the Web Chat service. Customer Services welcome any feedback Members may have to help improve the service.
- Contrary to recent reports; The Woodville will not be closing.
- The Woodville restructure will involve the training and development of existing staff.
- £111,000 is the total anticipated saving across Customer Services and the Woodville.
- The Woodville will consider the possibility of a 'Friends/Loyalty Scheme'
- The General Manager of the Woodville is very experienced and regularly meets with other Theatre Managers in the local area to ensure the shows are suitable and get the right balance within the entertainment offer.

Direct Service Operation (DSO)

1. Consider a number of options in respect of Waste and Recycling. These include introducing a recycling scheme for trade waste, charging property developers for the costs of wheeled bins in new developments, looking at potentially introducing new services around house/garden clearance and wheeled bin cleaning and looking to bring back the collection of clinical waste in house. To support all of this, officers are also asked to explore the potential of implementing a software solution to manage the waste management service, which could also be used in others areas across the depot.
2. In terms of the Cemeteries service, look at the potential of introducing a nominal fee for the basic family search service that is currently offered free of charge. Most authorities do have a charge for this service, even if it is just to cover the admin involved in undertaking the search.
3. Review the way horticultural services are provided by the council and in particular the Team Green scheme. The council has increased its own pool of apprentices and officers should explore using its own resources first.
4. Explore the potential for the commercialisation of the depot, in particular the Workshop element, which may lead to other opportunities moving forward.
5. Explore alternative uses for the building at the depot formerly occupied by Apollo, as this is currently being used for storage.

It is anticipated that the changes to the council's Direct Services Operation (DSO) functions will see the council deliver annual budget savings up to £193,500.

Following questions from the Committee; The Assistant Director (Environment) highlighted the following:

- Garden waste sacks are available for collection at the Civic Centre and the Borough Market. If people contact GBC and explain that they are unable to collect (e.g. due to health reasons) then the sacks will be delivered.
- The Brookvale Depot no longer supplies clear bin sacks due to health and safety reasons around members of the public visiting the site. There is a list of people who are allowed to collect clear sacks from the Civic reception (for those who do not have wheeled bins).
- New signage has worked well to prevent Fly-tipping. Three fixed penalty notices (£400 each) have been issued; two have been paid. Hidden cameras will be considered as an option to catch Fly-tippers but it is difficult to gain permission.
- Information on the new waste service (collection dates etc.) will be provided in a pack that will be inside the bin when delivered. A review will be conducted as to whether further hard copies of collection dates will be delivered to residents or whether to solely rely on the digital route.

- KCC now employ a separate contractor to do the grass cutting in Gravesham. GBC do some grass cutting for KCC (e.g. Echo Square, Imperial Business Estate) and are paid by KCC.
- More trees are planted by GBC than are cut down.
- By introducing new software systems GBC can streamline services then use staff for other areas.
- If GBC can plot dog bins, litter bins etc. via the GIS mapping software - then we can be smarter on scheduling and use less equipment, vehicles and review staffing structures.

Resolved that:

- **Planning & Regeneration**
The Committee note the report and this area of saving and are happy with the assurances that, once vacant posts have been appointed to, the Planning Department will be robust enough and doesn't require any additional support at this stage.
- **Customer & Theatre Services**
The Committee note the report, savings and the assurance from officers that the Theatre operation will be maintained.
- **Direct Service Operation (DSO)**
The Committee note the report, savings and the additional income streams.

Note: Cllr Sandra Garside (Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure & Arts) spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item.

105. Call in - Cabinet Item 10. Fleet Leisure Project Update

The Committee considered the following decision made by Cabinet on 12 June 2017:

That Cabinet hereby authorises the Director (Communities), in consultation with the Leader of the Executive, Head of Legal and the Director (Corporate Services), subject to consideration of all due diligence, legal, financial, procurement and contractual issues to take all necessary actions in relation to;

- Advertise the sport and leisure facility opportunity to perspective external organisations via appropriate advertising publications.
- Develop an evaluation framework for assessing any expressions of interest made.
- Award a long term lease to preferred partner organisation, subject to Planning.
- To continue negotiations with GCLL on a contract extension period up to 2025 for the leisure centres.

The Chair explained that he had called in this matter to examine further; the process used, the logic behind the extension of the contract and the lack of consultation with Members.

The Director (Communities) explained that in March 2015 it was agreed to extend the leisure centre contract with Gravesham Community Leisure Ltd (GCLL) to 2025 and include Fleet Leisure. A series of feasibility studies took place and project costs which were originally estimated to be around £2.6m were now estimated to be closer to £2.9m. At this time Ebbsfleet United Football Club decided not to be a major partner and long term hirer of the facility and so would have an impact on the income of the project. Structural surveys highlighted the poor condition of the site and that there would be major financial risk for the council and GCLL. There has been strong interest in the site and therefore following the decision not to carry on with the proposed project plan with GCLL the council will carry out a formal tender process to assess the most appropriate development scheme and partner organisation going forward.

Extending the leisure centre contract for a further period of up to five years allows the council time to assess the long term future of the leisure centres.

Following questions from the Committee, the Director (Communities) highlighted the following:

Fleet Leisure Project

- GBC hasn't spoken to Dartford Football Club but will make them aware of the upcoming tender process.
- There is no plan for housing on the site; the aim is for a sports and leisure facility (community use). There is a shortage of football pitches in the Borough which needs addressing.
- Grant monies from Sport England, FA etc. are being looked into.

GCLL contract extension

- There are more pros than cons with GCLL. They have good participation figures at the Leisure Centres and continue to pay GBC a yearly fee as agreed in the contract.
- The extension of the contract buys GBC time to plan for the future.
- GBC looked into the alleged issues at GCLL and no evidence was found.
- The legal advice given is that the VEAT Notice will cover this extension to contract.

Resolved that:

- **Fleet Leisure Project**
Whilst the Committee support the fact that things are moving forward and welcome assurances that the site be kept in public ownership, the Committee ask the Leader to actively consider having a cross-party working group before GBC go out to tender.
- **GCLL contract extension**
The Committee accept the Cabinet decision and ask Cabinet to agree that a cross-party working group be set up as soon as possible to look at the long term future of both leisure sites.

Note: Cllr Sandra Garside (Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure & Arts) spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm

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