

Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 19 October 2017

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: John Caller
 William Lambert
 Sara Langdale
 Brian Sangha
 Derek Shelbrooke
 Makhan Singh
 Michael Wenban

Also in attendance: Cllr Julia Burgoyne (Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration) and Cllr Leslie Hills (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance/Admin)

Tony Van Veghel Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

Stuart Bobby Director (Corporate Services)
Kevin Burbidge Director (Housing & Regeneration)
Wendy Lane Assistant Director (Planning)
Sarah Kilkie Assistant Director (Communities)
Michelle Batstone Corporate Change Manager
Tony Chadwick Acting Planning Policy Manager
Chris Wakeford Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

18. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Lee Croxton, Cllr Brian Sangha attended as his substitute.

19. Minutes

The Chair explained that Cllr Brian Sangha will replace Cllr John Caller on the Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff Scrutiny Review Sub-group.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2017 were signed by the Chair.

20. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21. To consider whether any items in Part A will be considered in private or any items in Part B in public

The Chair agreed to change the order of the agenda to accommodate the Assistant Director (Communities) who was assisting with a By-election today. The Part B Item 12. Expansion of South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control Partnership to include Canterbury City Council would be taken first.

22. Exclusion

Resolved 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 this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

23. Expansion of South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control Partnership to include Canterbury City Council

The Assistant Director (Communities) and Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership updated Members on a report that was presented to Cabinet on 9 October 2017 to approve the expansion of the STG Building Control Partnership by the inclusion of Canterbury City Council's building control service.

Over the years savings had been achieved in the delivery of this service due to economies of scale, web-based systems and income generated by consultancy services and it had long been an ambition to extend the partnership. The Joint Committee had been clear that this must not be to the detriment of the other partners. Therefore Canterbury City Council would be fully responsible for any costs associated with joining the Partnership and it was anticipated there would be a small reduction in existing partner costs. For Gravesham Borough Council the anticipated reduction in contribution for 2018/19 is approximately £2,000. Whilst the saving was small, the expansion would mean more staff resilience, greater opportunity to train and develop staff in-house, and exposure to a larger market and customer base.

The Joint Committee approved the inclusion of Canterbury City Council in the Partnership on 21 September. In addition, the Executives of Medway Council and Swale Borough Council approved the addition to the Partnership, as has Canterbury City Council's Policy & Resources Committee (on 4 October) and this decision would be submitted their Council meeting for final approval on 19 October 2017.

Upon receiving questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director (Communities) and Director, South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership highlighted the following:

- There is still an opportunity to look at consultancy work through a Local Authority Company to generate surplus which could be used to repay the original start up contributions.

- If Gravesham Borough Council wishes to leave the partnership; there are exit arrangements in the Memorandum of Association that involve a 12 month exit strategy.
- Canterbury joining the partnership should see an increase in income per capita and a fall in costs per capita.
- The partnership tries to keep surveyors in their original locations but hot desking and remote and agile working provides an opportunity when demand exceeds resource in a given area, and allows surveyors to be redeployed to provide backfill as required
- Customer service is of paramount importance to the partnership.
- Each committee member has one vote; irrespective of the size of the authority.
- The consultancy side of the partnership is very dependent on having sufficient resources.
- The new IT equipment is very responsive and plans can be accessed remotely.
- There is a proposal that will be put forward to officially change the name of the partnership to 'STG' Building Control Partnership as this is a recognised 'brand'.

Resolved that the Committee noted the report.

24. Return to Part A - Items being considered in Public

The Chair announced that the rest of the meeting will be in Part A / Public.

25. Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Document

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised Members that the Borough Council needed to move to the next stage of the Local Plan by preparing a Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Document. The Development Management Policies document was presented to Cabinet on 9 October 2017 for approval for consultation.

In September 2014 the Council adopted the Local Plan Core Strategy which set out the strategic planning policies to 2028. Carried over from the 1994 Gravesham Local Plan 1st Review were some saved Development Management Policies that need to be brought up to date in light of changes in legislation, Government Guidance and the adoption of the Core Strategy.

It was proposed that the Development Management Policies Issues and Options Document be placed on public consultation for 8 weeks as the consultation bridges the Christmas Holiday period. The document was structured to amplify existing policies including amenity, Green Belt etc. The document also included new policy areas, for example, Development Management Policy 20 would need to be developed to take into account recent government announcements that no further petrol and diesel engines would be built from 2040.

The Leader has asked that Polytunnels also be considered as there is currently no specific policy in respect of these and further investigation would be needed

Upon receiving questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director (Planning) and Director (Housing & Regeneration) highlighted the following:

- The Development Management Policies document is quite strict to ensure developments can be stopped if necessary. If Members feel the policies are too controlling; this can be reviewed.
- The Planning Policy team will try and add a bit more flexibility when it comes to cemetery and crematorium provision in the Green Belt.
- There are uncertainties (e.g. the Lower Thames Crossing and A2 junctions, London Resort; Development in Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) area, changes in Government Policy and Brexit) but the dangers of stopping the plan are far worse than moving forward.
- The Planning Policy Team is supportive of additional retail floorspace and encourage a diverse mix of uses in the town centre.
- The Planning Policy focuses on previously developed land sites. They are explicitly coming out with a growth perspective; only 6000 homes can be met in the urban area – leaving a gap of 2000; that's why other areas need to be looked at.
- There are no definitive plans at the moment; the proposal is to do a strategic Green Belt review. Members will need to decide where to make any strategic development allocations. . Once Members give a steer on how they want to meet the growth then we can move forward. This time next year there will be a consultation on the growth areas that Members have decided.
- Development delivery hasn't been brilliant recently but there are a number of developments coming forward.

The Assistant Director (Planning) explained to the Committee that officers would appreciate Members steering the public to the summary documents on the consultation that are easy to read and more accessible. The Assistant Director (Planning) would welcome cross-party support to get the public's voices heard.

The Chair commended the Assistant Director (Planning) and the Planning Policy Team for their in-depth knowledge and excellent work but advised that large scale public meetings should be included in the consultation process, not just drop-in sessions as outlined in the report.

The Chair put forward the following proposal: -

The Overview Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that large scale public meetings are held as part of the consultation process.

Members voted 4 in favour of the proposal and 4 against. The Chair had the casting vote and voted for the proposal.

Resolved that:

1. The Overview Scrutiny Committee noted the Allocations and Development Management Policies Document and the Cabinet position on this matter.

2. The Overview Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that large scale public meetings are held as part of the consultation process.

Note:

- Cllr Michael Wenban did not participate in the vote because he was feeling unwell and had left the Council Chamber, to return home, before the vote had taken place.
- Cllr Julia Burgoyne (Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration) spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item.

26. Draft Procurement Strategy

The Director (Corporate Services) provided Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the council's Procurement Strategy before it is formally approved at Cabinet on 6 November 2017.

The Procurement Strategy is intended to set out the principles that the council will follow in the acquisition of goods, works and services from third-party and in-house providers. The current strategy was last fully reviewed and updated in 2011.

The current approach is sharper than before with a focus on four key areas; compliance, efficiency, sustainability and commerciality.

The Committee suggested the following areas for consideration:

- The Council is pro-active and pursues positive promotion to engage with local businesses.
- The Council clearly publishes and promotes a timetable for procurement matters.
- The Council consider sharing procurement resources with other Authorities.
- The list of all local businesses that the Council has be made easily accessible through the website.

The Director (Corporate Services) agreed to feed back the comments from the Committee

Resolved that, subject to the above-mentioned comments being fed back, the Committee note and support the report.

27. Scrutiny Reviews - Oral Update

The Committee received an oral update on the two Scrutiny Reviews, following the first meeting of the Sub-groups on 9 October 2017:

Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff – update by Cllr David Hurley (Chair of the sub-group)

- Lesley Button (HR Manager) and Laura Lowrey (HR Business Partner) presented the group with an information pack which included sickness statistics across the directorate, the Investors in Investors In People (IIP) review, the employee

assistance programme and other general information relating to the reduction in staff and the impact it has had on the workforce.

- Members suggested the following recommendations following their discussions:
 - Regular 1-2-1 and staff meetings, managers need to ensure that these are being held across all departments of the council to ensure all staff have a forum for raising any potential concerns they may have.
 - Implementation of actions in order to address those areas identified in the staff assessment of the new IIP standards as potentially being areas for 'further work'.
 - Exploration of the development of a training tool/buddy system to assist new/newly promoted Managers in undertaking their managerial responsibilities.
- Further information was requested for the next meeting regarding sickness statistics and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) figures.
- There were some positive comments to note; GBC is committed to staff development, a good employer that promotes flexible working and develops apprenticeship schemes.
- There were also some concerns including; some staff feeling obliged to help out at GBC events, staff talks have reduced in frequency, career prospects appear limited, budget restraints mean managers struggle to meet staff health and safety needs.
- A Union representative will be invited to the next meeting
- Next meeting: Monday 4 December 2017, 5pm-6pm

The Committee noted that Cllr Brian Sangha will replace Cllr John Caller on the Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff Scrutiny Review Sub-group.

Waste & Recycling Service in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and Flats – update by Cllr Sara Langdale (Member of the sub-group)

- The sub-group received a document pack that provided information on the waste & recycling service for Gravesham's HMO's and Flats.
- Members suggested the following recommendations following their discussions on the HMOs and Flats:
 - All Council Members to review their specific ward areas and notify the appropriate Director of any potential HMOs they have identified within their wards. It is recognised that Members have a key positive role to play in this part of the service.
 - The Assistant Director Environment (and his team) actively engage with Landlords and Letting Agencies to roll out the process they have developed with Orange Property Services (Letting Agents) more widely.
 - The provision of food bins for HMO's is explored further, with potentially larger food bins to be provided where appropriate.
 - Officers actively explore the potential use of hessian bags for dry recyclables, to assist residents in transporting their recycling to the relevant bins.

The Corporate Change Manager explained that the sub-group felt that the work undertaken by the sub-group in reviewing the waste and recycling service had identified a number of recommendations and as such, there may not be a need for a further meeting. The draft

report for the review is in the process of being drafted and will be shared with the Chair of the sub-group and at this stage, it will be decided if a further meeting is required or not.

The Chair suggested that the sub-group thinks about time allocation for the relevant teams to do this work in a safe and tidy manner.

The Corporate Change Manager advised the Chair that she would feed the suggestion back to the Director (Environment) and the Assistant Director (Environment) for consideration.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress with the two Scrutiny Reviews

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.48 pm