

Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 16 January 2020

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Jordan Meade (Chair)

Cllr Steve Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Lyn Milner
Alan Ridgers
Christina Rolles
Peter Scollard

Please note: Cllr Lee Croxton (Cabinet Member for Operational Services) and Cllr Ejaz Aslam were also in attendance.

Stuart Bobby Director (Corporate Services)
Chris Wakeford Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny) (Minutes)

127. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Emma Morley and Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran. Cllr Lyn Milner and Cllr Baljit Hayre attended as their respective substitutes.

128. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held Thursday, 17 October 2019 were signed by the Chair.

129. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

130. Balancing the Budget – Update on Service Review Options and Additional Budget Initiatives Identified

The Director (Corporate Services) provided the Overview Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress that has been made in delivering the options previously identified in terms of the Service Review Process and the additional Budget Initiatives agreed.

The value of the combined activity from the service review process options and the balancing the budget initiatives totals £2,735,870 (the council identified £1,461,870 of activity from the service review process options, £31,870 more than the expected value of this workstream).

To date a total of £2,417,100 has been delivered i.e. accounted for within the Council's Medium-term Financial Plan, out of the total approved value of initiatives of £2,704,000.

There are a number of initiatives that have not yet been progressed for a variety of reasons, all of which are also detailed within appendix two to the report. Some of the options previously identified are no longer viable or have been progressed in different ways. It is proposed that all viable Service Review and Budget Initiatives that have not yet been implemented are reflected within the specific service areas operational Business Plan monitored by the respective Director and Lead Member. In addition, these will also form part of future budget monitoring reports.

Members were advised that this would be the final update report on the delivery of the Service Review and Budget Initiatives and as such, there will be no further reports to the Cabinet or Overview Scrutiny Committee on the Service Review and Budget Initiatives moving forward.

Cllr Leslie Hills highlighted that the Leader of the Council had informed the Cabinet that the Council will be employing a barrister to draft and send a letter to the appropriate government department, Minister and Member of Parliament to express the Council's concern regarding lack of information in relation to the Lower Thames Crossing and to request proper and meaningful engagement particularly as Gravesham will be most affected by the Crossing.

Cllr Hills requested that the contents of the letter be shared with Members.

The Chair agreed to speak to the Director (Corporate Services) about this matter, outside of the meeting, and then provide an oral update at the next meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Committee

The Committee commended the Director (Corporate Services) and all those involved in the service review process and balancing the budget initiatives.

The Director (Corporate Services) thanked Members for their support and highlighted that Gravesham Borough Council had made commendable progress under the 'bridging the gap' strategy.

Resolved that the Committee noted and commended the report.

131. Scrutiny Reviews Oral Update

Review of Street Cleanliness, Littering and Fly-tipping throughout the Borough

The Vice-Chair updated the Committee on the Street Cleanliness Scrutiny Review and highlighted the following:

- At the meeting of the Overview Scrutiny Committee on 17 October 2019 the Chief Executive outlined the pressure on officers and requested that this review be phased.
- The Review Group met on 13 January 2020 where the Vice-Chair proposed that the review be delayed until the next civic year (May 2020)
- The Vice-Chair explained that he had spoken with the Leader, Cabinet Member and Senior Officers and became very concerned that pressure on officers would hamper frontline services. The General Election in December diverted officer resources and the current executive have also introduced changes to improve the street scene in the town so, all considered, it makes sense to delay the review.

The Cabinet Member for Operational Services apologised for not attending the last meeting and highlighted the following:

- During the May election street cleanliness, fly-tipping etc. was the key issue that residents raised.
- The Gravesham MP raised his concerns about the cleanliness of the town but he didn't blame the administration or officers.
- There is now a clear focus that will begin with a deep clean of the town centre and look to empower officers to support one another.
- The Operational Services Team at Brookvale Depot are fundamentally excellent but it doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement
- If the review is delayed; the review group will be able to consider one whole year of progress.

The Committee discussed the issues they had encountered in the Borough with regards to fly-tipping, littering, street cleanliness etc. and noted that education / change in human behaviour played a big factor.

The Committee also discussed some of the improvements they had already seen in and around the town as well as improved response times on GBC social media when issues are raised.

The Director (Corporate Services) will feed this back to the Communications Team.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised the Committee that there had been an announcement from central government that Fly-tippers will face prison sentences. The Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC) will for the first time bring together law enforcement agencies, environmental regulators, HMRC and the National Crime Agency in order to tackle fly-tipping and mislabelling of hazardous waste.

The Committee welcomed the news from central government and noted the benefits this will have for the review.

Resolved that the Committee agreed to defer the commencement of the review until May 2020

Note: the Cabinet Member for Operational Services spoke with the leave of the Chair on this item.

Review of GBC's Maritime Strategy

The Chair updated the Committee on the Maritime Strategy Review Group:

- The review group will continue with its work and aim to complete the review by the end of April 2020.
- The review group met with Nadine Collins-Smith - Head of Thames Vision Delivery, Port of London Authority on 20 December 2019. The session raised some interesting points from how GBC needs to interact with the PLA to air quality to the effect of Tilbury 2 on the river. Nadine has an open dialogue with the group so questions can be submitted and she can be invited back in if needed.
- Next steps:
 - A comprehensive tour of Rochester Riverside Plaza is being arranged for February
 - Focus on the recreational use of the river and liaise with groups who currently use the river and those who don't
- The Chair thanked the Committee Service Officer (Scrutiny) for supporting the group.

The Committee suggested the following ideas for consideration by the review group:

- The use of the river for night time economy
- Consider the Lower Thames Crossing legacy fund and how it links to the river / review.

Resolved that the Committee noted the update on the Maritime Strategy Review and supported its continuation until the end of April 2020.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm