

Cabinet

Monday, 23 March 2020

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr Lee Croxton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Shane Mochrie-Cox
Lenny Rolles
Narinderjit Singh Thandi

Note: Councillors: Dikken and Meade were also in attendance.

David Hughes	Chief Executive
Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Nick Brown	Director (Housing & Operations)
Kevin Burbidge	Director (Planning & Development)
Lauren Wallis	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

80. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Sangha and Jenny Wallace.

81. To sign the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2020 were signed by the Chair.

82. To declare any interest members may have in the items contained on this agenda. When declaring an interest a member must state what their interest is.

Cllr Lenny Rolles declared an interest in agenda item 10 (Establishment of Rosherville Servicing Limited) and item 11 (Formation of a Local Authority Trading Company Subsidiary – Property Development Company) as he had been registered as a Director of the Rosherville and was the Chair of the Rosherville Limited Board. Cllr Lenny Rolles left the Chamber during consideration of these items.

83. To consider whether any items in Part A of the agenda should be considered in private or any items in Part B in public

The Chair took the opportunity to thank everyone with bearing with the Leadership of the Council and the Management Team during this difficult time. He thanked Cllr Jordan Meade – Leader of the Conservative Group for his co-operation with regard to the adjusted administrative arrangements in that all decision-making meetings of the Council would take place with the minimum number of members and officers present, would also be politically proportional and debate and decision making would be kept concise for the protection of participants. It would continue to be possible to call-in Cabinet decisions but this would only

take place in consultation between the political parties in an effort to keep meetings to a minimum. Cllr Meade, who was in attendance, confirmed his agreement with the arrangements and the Chair advised of the agreement of the Independent Group.

The Chair continued that where possible, all decisions would be made by the appropriate individual or the Leader of the Council.

The IT Service had been asked to investigate the use of cameras and/or recording equipment at meetings going forward as it would be better to engage with all Members.

84. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

85. Lower Thames Crossing Supplementary Consultation

Members were apprised of the Council's draft response to the supplementary consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing and received a review on the overall progress on this project.

The Director (Planning & Development) noted that the consultation had been extended by a week. However, the Leader of Thurrock Council had submitted a plea for a further extension given the current situation. A draft response would be submitted to Management Team and the Leader of the Council for consideration. The Government had responded positively to some of the Borough Council's suggestions but there were still areas that lacked detail or clarity in the documents including the electrical sub-station and arisings from tunnels and their disposal and these would be addressed in the Council's response.

The Chief Executive suggested the removal of the word "minor" in recommendation 1 to avoid the process becoming bogged down.

The Leader of the Conservative Group confirmed he was happy with the Cabinet's approach.

Resolved that:

- 1) the draft response to Highways England's Lower Thames Crossing Supplementary Consultation Questionnaire set out in Appendix 3 for submission by 25 March 2020 and authorise the Director (Planning and Development, in consultation with the Leader of the Executive, to make any necessary typographical or other adjustments ahead of submission;
- 2) the Supplementary Consultation Appraisal in Appendix 4 be noted;
- 3) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive for the production of a letter to Highways England, which will be jointly signed by the Leader of the Executive, setting out the concerns not covered by that response set out in Appendix 3 of the report. This letter will be sent shortly after the close of the supplementary consultation;
- 4) the Planning Inspectorate be sent a copy of the agreed letter referred to in 3) above, emphasising the Council's concerns about the adequacy of information in the PEIR and this consultation; and

- 5) It be agreed that the Director (Communities) write to Highways England from a property perspective including issues raised by the potential Compulsory Purchase of land at Cascades Leisure Centre.

86. Development of the Corporate Risk Register 2020-2021

Cabinet was informed of the outcomes from Gravesham Borough Council's annual risk identification and analysis exercise and were presented with a copy of the Corporate Risk Register for 2020/21.

Following a suggestion from the Chair to include a reference to Covid-19 be included in the Corporate Risk Register, the Director (Corporate Services) noted the steep learning curve with regard to the Council's Business Continuity Plans given the current Covid-19 outbreak and asked permission from the Chair for delegated authority, in consultation with the Leader, to include that current learning in the finalised version of the Risk Register as considered appropriate.

The Leader of the Conservative Group confirmed he was happy with the Cabinet's approach.

Recommended that the Corporate Risk Register that has been developed for 2020/21 be agreed for submission to Council.

87. 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.

88. Establishment of Rosherville Servicing Limited

Cllr Lenny Rolles left the Chamber during discussion and voting on this item.

Cabinet was provided with a business case, on behalf of the Board of Rosherville Limited, for the formation of a subsidiary company – Rosherville Servicing Limited. The Director (Housing & Operations) advised that the purpose of the company would be to provide vehicle servicing and repairs for the public and businesses and to provide an income stream for the Council. Improvements made within the Vehicle Workshop operation had delivered efficiencies and spare capacity to enable the team to undertake the extra work. The business case had been approved by the Board of Rosherville Limited on 25 February 2020 and the Vehicle Workshop would be ready to commence commercial work on 1 April. The Director (Housing & Operations) advised that Covid-19 was bound to have an adverse impact on customer demand but hopefully this impact would only be short term. If Covid-19 had an adverse impact on the Vehicle Workshop resources, work on the Council's vehicle fleet would be prioritised.

The Executive Member for Operational Services felt that this was an excellent approach which would enhance the Council's brand and he had every confidence in the operation and its employees.

Resolved that:

- 1) the formation of the Rosherville Servicing Limited subsidiary company be approved;
- 2) the provision of £15,000 working capital to Rosherville Servicing Limited as set out within the business case be approved; and
- 3) authority be provided for the Director (Housing & Operations) in conjunction with the Rosherville Limited Company Secretary to make the necessary arrangements to register the company with Companies House.

89. Formation of a Local Authority Trading Company Subsidiary – Property Development Company

Cllr Lenny Rolles left the Chamber during discussion and voting on this item.

Members were provided with a business case, on behalf of the Board of Rosherville Limited, for the formation of a subsidiary company – Rosherville Property Development Limited. The Director (Corporate Services) explained that authority was being sought to create a property development subsidiary which it was felt would be a success because of the demand for housing in the town centre. It was important to note that approval of funding for the proposed scheme in the town centre was not being sought and this would be the subject of a further report.

With reference to the Covid-19 impact, the Council was awaiting advice from the Council's advisors on this matter, Jones Lang LaSalle.

Resolved that:

- 1) the formation of the Rosherville Property Development Limited subsidiary company be approved; and
- 2) authority be provided for the Director (Corporate Services) in conjunction with the Rosherville Limited Company Secretary to make the necessary arrangements to register the company with companies House.

Cllr Lenny Rolles returned to the Chamber.

90. Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.Covid-19 Update

The Chief Executive advised that the Director (Corporate Services) had been tasked with keeping Councillors apprised of actions and issues and the Chief Executive was responsible for communications to staff. The Council's Management Team met daily to consider new announcements from the Government and a number of different work streams had been set up. For example, there was a resilience work stream with regard to home working and compliance with Government guidance. A third of Council staff were currently working from home on a week on week off rota basis. New categories of vulnerability were being identified and the Government would be sending out letters to 1.5 million people in the UK the first of which would be delivered the next day who would then have to stay indoors for the next 12

weeks. These people would need a great deal of support. The Government guidance on this had not yet arrived. Another work stream was how to provide support to all vulnerable people in the Borough and those over the age of 70 years. The Government had announced a great deal of support for example, for businesses who would be offered a Business Rate relief and grants etc and the Council was making preparations to roll out this relief to businesses as quickly as possible when the funding from Government was received.

The Chief Executive also advised of the following:

- £1billion of hardship support would be made available to people in real financial difficulty. However, Government guidance on how this funding was to be used had not yet been received.
- Issues had arisen about the closure of businesses and emergency regulations had been published in relation to Environmental Health and Trading Standards services which would enable officers to use prohibition powers and to issue fines for non-compliance to public houses, restaurants etc.
- There had been some modest changes to housing benefits and officers were working through this. Those making benefit claims were required to provide documents to support their claims and officers were considering using their discretion and asking claimants to submit their documents after the fact.
- The Civic Centre had been closed to the public as reception and other frontline staff had struggled to persuade people to maintain social distance.
- Some local authorities had closed their parks including the Royal Parks, to the public. The Council did not consider this measure a necessity in the Borough at the present time.
- Many local authorities were also closing children's play areas because of concern about social distancing. This subject would be discussed further at tomorrow's meeting of Management Team.
- One of the side effects of home working had been an increase of parking on residential streets and some local authorities had chosen not to take enforcement action. The Council intended to take enforcement action in the case of pinch points and access for emergency vehicles and common sense would be applied.

The Chief Executive concluded that it was a very busy time for officers and it would not be viable to give Members a daily update. Tribute was paid to the officers of the Council for all their hard work in an unprecedented situation.

The Director (Corporate Services) noted that it now recognised that the 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday was no longer reserved work time and the resilience team was working all hours. In the present circumstances the conventional out of hours service would not work and improved resilience arrangements were being put in place.

Chief Executive

The Chair noted that David Hughes last day as Chief Executive was 31st March 2020 and Stuart Bobby would be assuming the role of Chief Executive from 1st April 2020 as planned. However, David Hughes had offered to stay on for an additional month to assist the Council in coping with the current situation and the Chair expressed his appreciation. The Chief Executive had cancelled his farewell gathering. However, Cabinet wished to thank him for everything he had done for the Council and presented him with a small gift in the shape of a suitably engraved sterling silver Scottish Quaich which represented the gift of friendship. The

Chair hoped that the Chief Executive to come back later in the year to celebrate his retirement.

The Chief Executive thanked Members and advised that they could not have made a better choice of gift and stated that it had been a privilege to work at Gravesham.

Cllr Thandi advised that the Sikh Vaisakhi community event had had to be cancelled but he intended visit the Civic Centre to present a gift to the Chief Executive.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.07 pm