

Cabinet

Monday, 7 September 2020

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Shane Mochrie-Cox
Lenny Rolles
Brian Sangha
Narinderjit Singh Thandi
Jenny Wallace

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Nick Brown	Director (Housing & Operations)
Kevin Burbidge	Director (Planning & Development)
Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Jan Guylar	Head of Legal Services
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Andrew Barnett	Principal Accountant (General Fund)
Alexandra Jarvis	Principal Accountant (Housing & Exchequer)
David Herrington	Digital Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager

23. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2020 were signed by the Chair.

24. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

25. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

26. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter One 2020-21

The Cabinet received an update against the Performance Management Framework for Quarter One 2020-21 (April to June 2020).

Appendix Two provided a summary of corporate performance in the last reporting quarter, with the following key statistical headlines:-

- 50% of reported indicators improved or maintained their level of performance;
- 50% of reported indicators had fallen in their level of performance.

Specifically in consideration of the adopted corporate objectives, the following headlines were presented for the last reporting quarter:-

- People: 50% of reported indicators improved or maintained their level of performance;
- Place: 40% of reported indicators improved or maintained their level of performance; and
- Progress: 67% of reported indicators improved or maintained their level of performance.

Information on performance over the period was presented in tabular and graphical form for all indicators. Where any data was not presented, this related either to those indicators reported on an annual basis or, alternatively, where data had not yet been submitted in time for the presentation of the report. Any outturns where data had been unable to be reported will be presented within the next available reporting cycle to Cabinet and the relevant Cabinet Committees.

The Chief Executive advised that, following Cabinet's review, all Cabinet Committees will be presented with individual performance reports tailored to the respective portfolio responsibilities. Alongside statistical content, these will provide more detailed contextual or qualitative updates outlining what activity the Council had delivered and what action will be taken to successfully realise the Corporate Plan's corporate objectives and policy commitments.

The Cabinet acknowledged that a number of the performance targets had fallen in their level of performance however those targets related to key services that had shut down completely with staff being diverted to support the most vulnerable members of the community during the lockdown period.

The Cabinet thanked everyone who was involved in the collective effort to support the most vulnerable in the community, local businesses and the wider public during the lockdown period.

27. Albion Waterside (Canal Basin area) - Possible Compulsory Purchase Order requirement

The Cabinet was informed that the regeneration of the Canal Basin area was of key importance to the Council and will be of benefit to the riverside area and the Borough as a whole. It was a strategic site for the emerging Local Plan and its redevelopment would be essential for regeneration of that area and housing delivery.

Over the years, effort had been made with various developers to bring forward a comprehensive scheme for the area but, to date, only 350 of an originally permitted scheme for circa 1,000 homes had been delivered. A developer had recently approached the Council, having obtained an interest in a large part of the remaining identified development area, intent on bringing forward an exciting, mixed-use development, and negotiations were currently ongoing with neighbouring landowners to acquire the other parcels within the development area.

In the event that acquisition by agreement was not possible, the Director (Planning and Development) advised that it was now considered appropriate to commit to the principle of using Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers under part IX of the Town and Country

Planning Act 1990. Such a decision had been taken before, when the Council was working with Countryside Properties Plc on the project but, given the passage of time, it was considered inappropriate to rely on that decision.

Should the Council determine the need to invoke CPO proceedings, a useable budget of circa £25,000 would be required, albeit this would be reimbursed by the developer.

The Cabinet acknowledged that the Canal Basin was of key importance to the Council and supported the principle of using CPO powers in order to bring forward the comprehensive redevelopment of that area.

The Cabinet stated that there were also a number of other key sites within the Borough that had stalled and requested that CPO powers be considered for those sites too.

Resolved that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Executive and other officers as appropriate, be authorised to progress the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order for the land as outlined red on the plan attached at Appendix 2 to the report in the event that acquisition by agreement cannot be secured.

28. Parish Street Lighting

The Cabinet was informed that the Council's maintainable lighting assets, including those within the parishes of Higham, Meopham and Vigo, had been maintained on its behalf by Kent County Council (KCC) through its own lighting maintenance contract.

The Cabinet was informed that KCC was currently undertaking a programme of improvements to its own lighting stock and had advised the Council that it will no longer be supporting assets of the Council's that had not been similarly upgraded but, for eligible assets, once upgraded they would be prepared to adopt them and take responsibility for future management and maintenance.

Officers had therefore undertaken an audit of GBC assets within the urban area to ensure current necessary repairs can be undertaken in the short term and were engaging consultants to review those assets eligible for adoption and provide a cost estimate for the work to be undertaken.

For reasons that current Officers have been unable to establish, in September and November 1980 respectively, the Council entered into agreements with the then Higham and Meopham Parish Councils (the latter now covering the newer parish of Vigo) to 'operate, maintain and finance' the functions with regard to street lighting, which then rested with the parishes by virtue of Section 3 of the Parish Councils Act 1957. No such agreement exists within any of the other parished parts of the Borough.

At recent meetings of Parish Council Chairmen, this matter had been discussed and the Leader indicated that the Council would be reviewing its position in respect of these agreements, with a view to termination.

Therefore, it was recommended that these contracts be terminated at 31 March 2022, which would require written notice to be served by the end of September 2020. Any letter would be accompanied by a plan and list of all known, maintainable assets within their area.

The Cabinet acknowledged that the agreement between the Council and the relevant Parish Councils allowed for any incurred costs by the Council to be recharged to the relevant Parish Council. The Cabinet agreed that it was important for the Council and relevant Parish Councils to work in partnership during the termination of these contracts.

Resolved that the Director (Planning and Development) be authorised to write to Higham, Meopham and Vigo Parish Councils to advise them of a decision to terminate the Agreement to operate, maintain and finance street lighting assets within their areas at 31 March 2022, advising the other parishes of that decision as a courtesy.

29. London Resort Consultation

The Cabinet was informed that, in July 2020, London Resort launched a statutory consultation on its current proposals. The project was being taken forward by means of a Development Consent Order application (DCO) which was currently timetabled for November 2020. An Environmental Scoping report was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on which Gravesham and other local authorities and statutory agencies commented. Gravesham's response was attached to the report for Members' information.

The report also detailed the current proposals including the direct impact on Gravesham, benefits and opportunities and potential threats.

The Assistant Director (Planning) advised that the Council continued to be actively involved with the proposal and it was felt that the London Resort Company Holdings (LRCH) team was trying to be open and transparent about their proposals and the impacts that it will have. Officers will maintain that ongoing dialogue with the LRCH team to ensure that any concerns this Council may have continue to be addressed through the process.

The Cabinet was informed that there were a number of matters that needed to be explored further with the applicant to understand what the full implications will be and what can be done to mitigate the impacts.

Part of the problem continued to be the degree of uncertainty. If the project was to be as successful as the LRCH team thinks it will be, Gravesend could benefit significantly from the spin-off tourism jobs and footfall as well as the direct, indirect and catalytic jobs in the supply chain.

However, if things become tighter, the proposal could be a negative force on Gravesend town centre and the local economy.

The Cabinet stated that it was essential that there continued to be co-creation. The LRCH team needed to continue to work in partnership with local authorities, statutory agencies and the community.

30. General Fund Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21 – Quarter One

The Cabinet received the first budget monitoring report for 2020/21 showing the position up to 30 June 2020. The Cabinet noted the information provided on:-

- actual performance against the approved Revenue and Capital budgets for 2020/21, including projected variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity; and
- other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan or Financial Statements.

Significant risks to the General Fund's financial position continued to come from the lack of clarity regarding the long-term future of local government funding, and more recently, the financial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet acknowledged the financial impact of Covid-19 and thanked the efforts of Members and Officers in delivering the Bridging the Gap programme over the last eight years which had resulted in the Council's having a strong level of reserves which will be sufficient to avoid serious financial difficulty in the short-term. The Cabinet urged the Government to help make up the shortfall suffered directly as a result of Covid-19 and requested that relevant guidance be released in a timely manner.

Officers confirmed that the Council will continue to maintain strong financial governance arrangements and will continue to lobby the Government, with other Kent authorities, regarding the long-term future of local government funding as well as the financial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet expressed its concern regarding the Government's proposal to reform/merge local government in order to generate savings.

The Cabinet praised the work of Officers during the lockdown period and since, in particular, the Waste and Operational Services Team.

31. Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter One 2020/21

The Cabinet received the first budget monitoring report for 2020/21 showing the position up to 30 June 2020. The Cabinet noted the information provided on:-

- actual performance against the approved Revenue and Capital budgets for 2020/21, including known variances agreed or identified through budgetary control activity; and
- other key areas of financial performance that may impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan, HRA Business Plan or Financial Statements.

Significant risks to the HRA's financial position continued to come from the lack of clarity regarding the long-term future of local government funding, and more recently, the financial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Leader stated that the Council was still committed to delivering the new homes in the Borough.

In relation to hall lettings, clarification was sought as to whether Community Centres would be reopened once it was safe to do so in particular Shears Green Community Centre.

The Director (Housing and Operations) advised that the Community Centres would be reopened following completion of the necessary risk assessments by the individual groups etc. which use the Community Centres within the Borough.

The Leader stated that the Community Centres would only reopen if it was safe to do so and in a controlled manner.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.02 pm