

Cabinet

Monday, 18 December 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)

Councillors: Emma Morley
Narinderjit Singh Thandi
Jenny Wallace

Note: Councillors Karina O'Malley and Alison Williams were also in attendance.

Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox was also present via a virtual media platform which is not recognised as attendance under the Local Government Act 1972. Councillor Mochrie-Cox did not participate in the discussion and voting of the items contained within the agenda.

Stuart Bobby	Chief Executive
Nick Brown	Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive
Jamie Izzard	Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth)
Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Lisa Nyon	Assistant Director (Corporate Services)
Andy Rayfield	Communications Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

58. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Lauren Sullivan.

59. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6 November 2023 were signed by the Chair.

60. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

61. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

No decisions other than those already circulated had been made.

62. Annual Review of the Payroll Shared Service

The Cabinet was provided with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Payroll Shared Service with Medway Council.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised that the report gave an overview of the shared service arrangement and updated Members on the progress made against recommendations identified in the previous year review together with recommendations/service improvements for the coming year.

Unfortunately, the review of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) had not yet been concluded and that little progress had been made against the recommendations set last year. This was due to staffing challenges at Medway Council. Quarterly strategic payroll meetings and operational meetings had now been established between GBC and Medway Council so GBC will endeavour to work with Medway Council to get the review of the SLA and last year's recommendations concluded as soon as reasonably possible.

From Gravesham's perspective the shared service was working well in that both officers and Members were being paid accurately and on time. The payroll service had an annual cost of £40,000 which was seen as good value for money,

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

63. Annual review of the Legal Shared Service

The Cabinet was provided with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Legal Shared Service with Medway Council.

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) advised that the report gave an overview of the shared service arrangement and updated Members on the progress made against recommendations identified in the previous year review together with recommendations/service improvements for the coming year.

The Cabinet was informed that the service had experienced recruitment and retention issues during the last year and that a recruitment process was currently underway.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

64. Communications and Engagement Strategy and Social Media Policy

The Cabinet was presented with updates to the Communications and Engagement Strategy and its associated Social Media Policy.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy 2019-2023 was adopted by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 November 2020.

The strategy provided a framework for all corporate communications to internal and external audiences and ensured all proactive communications were linked to and were promoting one or more of the Corporate Plan's key objectives.

At its meeting on 17 October 2023, Full Council adopted the Council's Corporate Plan for the period 2023-27. Therefore, the adoption of the Corporate Plan 2023-27 required a review of the Communications and Engagement Strategy to ensure it continued to support the new Corporate Plan and its core objectives: #oneborough, #onecommunity #onecouncil.

The review was also an opportunity to ensure the strategy accurately reflected the economic and strategic environment in which the Council was operating.

The Communications Manager advised that the Social Media Policy was an appendix to the Communications and Engagement Strategy and, in early 2023, an internal audit was carried out to ensure that the strategy and the Communications Team was delivering against its objectives. Whilst returning a green opinion, there was one recommendation relating to the Social Media Policy, as follows: “A process to be put in place to ensure that relevant Council communications are placed on corporate social media channels/accounts in preference to personal accounts.”

This recommendation was prompted by a small concern over the use of LinkedIn by Council officers. LinkedIn was a social media channel focussed on users’ work and professional lives and as such had potential for there to be crossovers between personal and corporate posts.

In August 2023, guidance for officers using LinkedIn, including what constitutes corporate updates and how they should be handled, was issued to all staff. That guidance had now been incorporated into the Social Media Strategy.

The updated Communications and Engagement Strategy together with the Social Media Strategy was attached at Appendix II and Appendix III for Members’ consideration.

The Cabinet was supportive of the strategies and felt that they provided clear guidance regarding the acceptable use of electronic communications and social media both within and outside of work.

The Cabinet also welcomed that the Communications and Engagement Strategy looked for alternative communications channels, not just social media, to engagement with older generations such as the Gravesham 50+ Forum and Age UK.

Resolved that the updates to the Communications and Engagement Strategy and Social Media Policy be agreed.

65. Fees and Charges Report 2024-25

The Assistant Director (Corporate Services) informed Members that for over a decade local government had experienced significant and sustained cuts to its funding whilst demand on services had risen. The latest Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covering the period (2022/23 to 2026/27, revised in January 2023) indicated that income from Fees and Charges was intended to deliver an additional £307,000.

Due to the uncertainty regarding local government funding together with recent increases in energy, fuel prices and inflation that had put significant pressure on the Council’s budget, the contribution of fees and charges as part of the annual budget setting process was an opportunity to maximise its financial position in the current economic climate and to achieve policy objectives; for example by influencing the use of a service or to alter patterns of behaviour.

The Financial Procedure Rules required the Council to review fees and charges at least annually in accordance with the Council’s budget setting framework. The responsibility for determining fees and charges had been delegated to Directors and Assistant Directors. In reviewing fees and charges, Directors would liaise with their appropriate Lead Member to consider any proposed revisions to charges or the introduction of new charges.

The authority had in place a Charging Strategy which outlined the key considerations of the Council to ensure that fees and charges for services were set in a transparent and consistent manner.

As part of the fees and charges review exercise, the Charging Strategy was also reviewed; the review concluded that the strategy did not require any significant updates from that agreed with Members in November 2011.

Senior Officers, in conjunction with their Lead Member, undertook a review of the current schedule of fees and charges and determined the level of fees and charges for the forthcoming financial year. The proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 which will be effective from 1 April 2024 (unless otherwise stated) were detailed at appendix two of the report for Members' information. The proposed fees and charges will ensure full cost recovery for delivering those services wherever possible.

The Cabinet was informed that agenda page 59 referred to costs for a casket for stillborn and up to 17 years. The Director (Environment) confirmed that there would be no cost for residents of the Borough and that the schedule of fees and charges would be updated.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report subject to the above amendment.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm.