

Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee

Monday, 17 June 2024

7.30pm

Present:

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox (Chair)
Cllr Alison Williams (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Rajinder Atwal
 David Beattie
 Baljit Hayre
 Gavin Larkins
 Jordan Meade
 Alan Metcalf

Shazad Ghani Head of Planning
Chloe Taylor Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Aslam and Cllr Bains, Cllr Metcalf and Cllr D Ashenden substituted respectively.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee held on Wednesday 27 March 2024, were agreed and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Mochrie-Cox declared an interest as he was employed by Kent County Council.

Cllr D Ashenden declared an interest as his daughter in law worked for Eurostar.

4. Corporate Performance: Quarter Four 2023-24

The Head of Planning presented members of the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee with an update against the performance management framework, as introduced within the council's corporate plan, for Quarter Four 2023 – 24 (January to March 2023). This report was for information purposes only.

The Head of Planning went through the corporate performance page by page, highlighting the following key points, and following questions and comments from members, explained the following:

- PI19 – This sets out the percentage of major planning applications processed on time, which was 100%.

- PI20 – This sets out the percentage of minor planning applications processed on time. The number varied and Q4 reflected the pressures on the team in terms of determining Northfleet Harbourside etc.
- PI21 – Performance had been relatively good and was in keeping with previous quarters, though slightly higher.
- PI22 – Set out the total formal planning enforcement actions taken. This is where a notice has been served in some form and showed a slight increase from previous quarters. The head of planning advised members that they were currently in the process of reviewing and refining systems and procedures in terms of planning enforcement. At the time of the meeting, they had approximately 71 cases. It was likely that 19 of those moving forward would receive an enforcement notice if matters were not resolved. Approximately 13 of those 71 cases were likely to be resolved through voluntary procedures. The Chair advised that, in future, the level of detail included within the corporate performance report should reflect this additional contextual information provided at the meeting.
- The Head of Planning clarified that within the Q4 period, officers had worked with legal officers to submit three enforcement notices. The Chair requested that the number of cases under appeal also be included.
- PI23 – The total net additional homes added to the Council Tax valuation list. This was in keeping with what they expected to see over the winter period. During Q4, a drop in figures was expected due to the winter months, bulk holidays etc. In terms of delivery, they would expect Q4 to be the lowest.
- PI24 was an annual indicator.

The committee noted the report.

5. Local Validation List Review

The Head of Planning held a presentation for the committee on the local validation list review and asked that the committee considered the report and provided their comments on the presentation.

The presentation outlined that:

- The local validation list explains which drawings and supporting information should be submitted as part of a planning application to enable a decision to be made.
- The guidance note was produced to explain the national validation requirements that are required for all planning applications, explain the council's additional local information requirements, ensuring that planning applications are supported by the information needed for assessment, and to make sure that interested parties have enough information to understand and comment on development proposals.
- The current validation list was adopted by the Council in 2020.
- There was a requirement for it to be reviewed every two years.
- Common invalidation reasons and statutory national requirements.
- Another key reason for its need for reviewed was due to the recently adopted Design for Gravesham.

Following questions and comments, the Head of Planning explained that:

- The Chair noted that this would not come to him for approval before it had come back

to the committee. Once it had gone to consultation, it would come back to the committee for final comments before approval.

- SAMMS payments could not form part of the validation checklist because it was a different procedural area, but the Head of Planning agreed to take away the comment on Ramsar payments being more transparent and a simpler process to be considered for developers to follow.
- The average determination period for an application varies significantly. Householder applications should be determined within 8 weeks and major applications should be determined within 13 weeks. In recent months, the planning guarantee had been changed by Government, with a view to improving determination periods. Whilst the desire for major planning applications was to determine an application within 13-weeks, they were significantly more complicated, and the Head of Planning advised that in his experience, no local planning authority had determined a major planning application of scale within this period. The national average for major planning applications tended to be around 1.5/2 years.
- Officers identify the main type of application householders submit and split the document down and have the householder guidance document that sets out the steps that an applicant must take and the documents they will need to provide.

The aim was to go out to consultation with the draft local validation and then bring it back to committee in September for final comments.

6. Draft Transport Strategy

The Head of Planning shared the initial draft of the transport strategy and highlighted the following key points, and following questions and comments from members, explained the following:

- The document explored the need to improve walking, cycling, and public transport to address the poor links and provision Gravesham currently has.
- There was a recognised need to improve the environment locally and the lifestyles of local residents, and ensuring that businesses, residents and all transport users are able to meet their day to day needs with an effective transport system.
- Highways England had been renamed National Highways and this would be reflected within the strategy.
- The Head of Planning agreed to add engaging with schools in the borough into the strategic aims.
- The Chair noted that GBC was not the transport authority, and that it was mainly KCC or National Highways. However, residents had raised various transport issues with councillors and there were issues that they could lobby for, and it was about working in partnership with transport authorities to deliver for the people of Gravesham.
- The strategy sets out some of the key characteristics of the borough in terms of green belt rural areas and where the principal settlements were; namely Gravesend and Northfleet.
- There had been a 5.1% increase in people living in the borough between 2011 and 2021, and a corresponding 3.2% increase in the number of households in the borough. Looking at the 2021 census data, which relates to how people travel to work – this varies from the 2011 data but was not directly comparable due to the pandemic.

- The Chair noted that there was cross-party agreement on the opposition to Lower Thames Crossing.
- The Head of Planning agreed to input the total number of EV charging points installed around the borough within the strategy and noted that if the usage information was also available, this could also be included.
- Corporately, GBC was in favour of Ebbsfleet International (Eurostar) re-opening and was happy to include this within the strategy subject to committee being in agreement.
- One of the primary reasons it had not been re-opened was due to the changes around Brexit and it required additional spending and investment.
- The Head of Planning agreed to pick up the point made on the visibility of walking paths around the borough.
- The Chair notes that until the borough had a transport system that could meet the needs of residents in a convenient way, they would encourage choosing an alternative method to driving a car.
- The Head of Planning agreed to look into the wording on the outcomes, in relation to the reduced number of persons killed and/or seriously injured.
- This document would not form part of the Development Plan Policy but would inform how they approach parking matters as part of the local plan and how this was done as part of the development plan at present. In due course, if there were any revisions required to the standards then this could be picked up.
- The Chair informed the committee that all strategies will have an action plan sitting alongside it and that this would be a part of the final strategy.
- An annual report would be delivered on the action plan and the strategic objectives.

The committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.26pm