

Cabinet

Monday, 10 January 2011

7.00pm

Present:

Cllr David Turner (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs: John Cubitt
Laura Hryniewicz
Anthony Pritchard
Adrian Warburton

Note: Cllrs John Burden, John Caller, Lee Croxton and Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi were also in attendance

Glyn Thomson	Chief Executive
Nick Brown	Director (Transformation & Finance)
Kevin Burbidge	Director (Business)
Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Cheryl Russell	Director (Housing and Environment)
Wale Adetoro	Assistant Director (Housing & Environment)
Julie Gibbs	Assistant Director (Transformation & Finance)
Stuart Bobby	Service Manager (Financial Services)
Sue Lord	Service Manager (Regeneration and Policy)
Nick Channon	Committee Services Officer

71. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from the Chairman, Cllr Michael Snelling.

72. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2010 were signed by the Chairman.

73. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

74. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members

The following decisions had been taken by the Leader of the Executive on 15 November 2010 and 23 November 2010 respectively.

1. That the compensation provisionally agreed in respect of land that is required for the South Thames Development Route, Stage 4 (STDR4) was approved and the Director

(Business) in association with the Assistant Director (Business & Law) be authorised to dispose of the land.

2. That the new Lease in respect of Unit A, Springhead Enterprise Park be entered into with the existing tenants, including a service charge on the basis that the tenant accepts the terms and the Assistant Director (Business & Law) be authorised to enter into a new Lease.

75. Environment, Adaptation Plan & Local Authority Plan

The Cabinet was informed that Kent County Council has produced a Kent Environment Strategy, a Climate Adaptation Plan and the Borough Council will produce a Local Action Plan.

The Kent Environment Strategy sets out how it is proposing to respond to the pressures facing Kent's environment particularly as a result of carbon emissions and climate change. The County Council has invited District Councils in Kent to adopt the Strategy in order to provide a basis for co-ordinated action through the Kent Partnership.

Further to this Kent County Council has produced, on behalf of all Councils in Kent (working closely in partnership during the development of such) an adaptation plan which takes a risk based approach to the identification of appropriate and proportionate responses to threats and opportunities of climate change. Through a series of workshops this authority has also drawn up further local actions specifically for Gravesham which will come to a later Cabinet.

Members were informed that subject to adoption of the Kent Environment Strategy and the Climate Adaptation Plan the Borough Council will now work with specific officers and county and district colleagues to develop individual and joined up action plans to implement the objectives of this authority, subject to available resource and impact on this Council.

Resolved that

- (1) the County Council be informed that this Council will support the development and implementation of the Kent Environment Strategy insofar as it is consistent with this Council's corporate priorities and to the extent that resources will allow;
- (2) the County Council be informed that this Council will support the Adaptation Plan and adopt such actions which are relevant to this authority and will contribute to the joint actions where applicable and where resources allow;
- (3) the further development and exploration of a Local Action Plan which addresses more operational environmental actions and improvements be approved.

76. Housing Allocations Policy - Amendment

The Cabinet was requested to approve a revision to the Housing Allocations Policy whereby applicants without a local connection will be assessed for inclusion on the housing register by a special panel comprising the Lead Member for Housing and the Director (Housing & Environment).

Resolved that the amendment to the Allocations Policy be approved and that this change be adopted into the Allocations Policy.

77. Disabled Adaptations for Housing Tenants

The Cabinet was requested to approve viring funding within the Housing Capital budget to reduce the current waiting list for disabled adaptations from the current two year waiting list for such adaptations.

Resolved that the virement of £60,000 from the Housing Capital budget for Improvements & Conversions Budget to fund further disabled adaptations to reduce the current two year waiting list for such adaptations be approved.

78. Housing Policy Review

The Cabinet was reminded that in the early part of 2010 officers embarked on a review of the most important policies and management statements pertaining to housing.

The main policies and statements are:-

- decant policy;
- domestic abuse policy;
- former tenants arrears policy;
- homeless policy;
- rent setting policy;
- tenancy management statement;
- vulnerability policy.

Members were reminded that the Housing Policy Overview Committee has informed the consultation process with extra meetings of the Committee being built into the municipal calendar to assess these major policies.

Following meetings of the Policy Overview Committee the policies/statements have been open to consultation with key stakeholders, bespoke resident groups, non-housing officers of the Council who have direct or indirect contact with housing and general consultation on the Council's website.

Resolved that the policies and management statement listed at Appendices A-G to the report be adopted.

79. Working jointly with Kent County Council and other partners in relation to property assets

The Cabinet was apprised of the proposals for joint working between Kent County Council and Gravesham Borough Council in respect of both freehold and leaseholder properties within the Gravesham Borough area. Members were reminded that at several levels the County Council and Gravesham have been working more closely together in relation to the use of assets over the past 2 to 3 years.

The Total Place Initiative has sought a "top down and bottom up" approach to encourage better understanding and use of assets across the wider public sector, including national government.

There has already been initial work between Gravesham and Kent County Council through use of assets by a number of services, including community services, library facilities, children's services and specialist facilities and the County Council is currently focussing on the re-structuring of the Council and its services and this will need to dovetail with the wider asset rationalisation programme with public agencies in Gravesham.

Members were apprised of a number of short term and medium term projects within the borough and it could be seen that there are a range of opportunities for joint working in connection with the assets the County Council owns within Gravesham that will deliver improvements to the accessing and delivering of services, plus efficiencies and financial savings.

Resolved that the proposed approach for joint working between Kent County Council and Gravesham Borough Council in connection with the property they own or lease within Gravesham be approved, including asset rationalisation where practicable and the appropriate portfolio Members and officers be requested to take the necessary action to progress the proposals.

80. Lower Thames Crossing and Local Transport Plan 3

The Cabinet was reminded that Kent County Council is in the process of preparing its Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) for the period 2011/16.

On 1 December 2010 Kent County Council launched the "Growth without Gridlock" document in the form of an executive summary. The main document followed on just before Christmas. From the Borough Council's point of view this proposes a Lower Thames Crossing east of Gravesend as a core part of the strategy. This is supported by a technical engineering report and the presentation on claimed benefits. This proposal is also seen as a key policy objective for the emerging Kent/Essex/East Sussex Local Enterprise Partnership.

Kent County Council had required a response on the draft Local Transport Plan 3 by 31 December 2010 which was sent by the Leader of the Executive, a copy of which was appended to the report for Members' information. Members considered the response to LTP3 and the Borough Council's overall view on the Lower Thames Crossing issues.

Resolved that

- (1) the Borough Council reaffirms its opposition to any Lower Thames Crossing route that runs through east Gravesham;
- (2) Kent County Council be informed of its specific comments:-
 - (a) that residents are potentially being impacted by a route for a scheme that it does not currently have a remit to deliver;
 - (b) the crossing being suggested does not have a route north of the river, without which it makes no sense as a strategic road link;

- (c) the costs have been significantly understated as a complete scheme has to be built, and neither have the wider implications been made clear;
- (3) the comments already made to Kent County Council on Local Transport Plan 3 as set out in the Appendix, and their preferred approach to scheme evaluation be endorsed;
- (4) on the Lower Thames Crossing section in Local Transport Plan 3 Kent County Council to be requested that it either:-
 - (a) notes the issue and possible solutions as set out in the Parsons Brinckerhoff Study for Department of Transport; or
 - (b) conducts a full Strategic Environmental Assessment / Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations assessment as required by the regulations if it wishes to propose a particular route, including an alignment to the north of the River Thames;
- (5) that the Department of Transport be informed that its studies will need to look at the wider strategic context as well as specific proposals across the Thames, and that the Borough Council would wish to be a member of any stakeholder group and participate in a positive way;
- (6) that officers be authorised to explore more fully the implications of a route east of Gravesend and discuss with interested parties both within and outside the Borough.

81. Shared Services - operational update

The Cabinet was updated on shared services development and opportunities with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council in relation to Environmental Health and to agree a way forward for authority for future shared working in respect of specific operational officers.

The Council has entered into a number of shared working arrangements with neighbouring Councils to further the delivery of Value for Money services to the community. Following the early success of these arrangements the Council is exploring more opportunities to develop shared working arrangements where it is considered this will deliver savings, improved service quality, increase service resilience or any combination of these benefits.

A standard "business case" approach has been designed to assist the decision making process for the introduction of full shared service arrangements or joint managers with other Councils.

Resolved that the Director (Transformation & Finance) in consultation with the Leader of the Executive, the appropriate Lead Member and the Leader of the Opposition be authorised to agree operational staffing arrangements with other Councils to facilitate the progression of shared working between Councils.

82. Budget Monitoring Report 2010/11

The Cabinet considered the Budget Monitoring Report against the 2010/11 original estimates for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Budget in light of formulation of the probable budget estimate for 2010/11.

Members were informed that the original budget for 2010/11 represents a net revenue budget of £14,444,300 for the General Fund with this being mainly funded from central government grant, council tax and other general grant funding, such as area based grant. In addition, the Housing Revenue Account Budget for the year represents a net deficit of £535,840.

Explanations for any major variances identified against the Original Budget and split by directorate were identified for Members.

The Cabinet was informed of the level of reserves, ongoing potential variances and current economic pressures affecting the Council. The forecast surplus for the General Fund Budget is £142,500, and additionally, a £213,000 saving on the Housing Revenue Account against the Original Budget.

The Medium Term Financial Plan is constantly being reviewed in order to take into account longer term assumptions and inflation rates. Central government grants and energy prices, together with all known variances for the Council's budget, resulting from Management Team and Cabinet decisions during 2010/11, are also taken into account.

The Medium Term Financial Plan reflects freezing council tax for 2011/12 together with the anticipated compensatory grant receivable from the government in relation to such a freeze. Members were reminded that the Communities and Local Government Department had stated that if an authority freezes council tax for 2011/12 it will be eligible to receive a grant in each of the four parliamentary years, equivalent to a 2.5 per cent increase in its 2010/11 basic amount of council tax, multiplied by the Council's tax base for 2011/12. This is estimated to be around £150,000 per annum for Gravesham Borough Council. This amount has been built into the Medium Term Financial Plan. However, no assurances have been provided that this grant will be received beyond 2014/15.

In a commitment to increase transparency and accountability with residents, Council spending for invoices over £500 has been published on-line. Members were reminded that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2010/11 was approved by Full Council on 2 March 2010 and the authority's investment strategy which is incorporated in the TMSS outlines the authority's investment priorities.

In line with the recommendations made by both the Audit Commission and CIFPA following the recent turmoil in the financial markets an update on treasury management performance is provided to Members on a quarterly basis. Members were advised of the effects upon the General Fund working balance and the effect of any changes to the programme as identified during the current financial year to date and the funding situation for the General Fund Capital Programme as a whole.

The position for the Housing Revenue Account Budget was detailed together with the current Housing Capital Programme.

Resolved that portfolio holders work with Directors to take necessary management actions to bring variances back into line with budgets.

83. Exclusion

Resolved pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded during the following items 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 these items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

84. Proposed moorings off St Andrew's Gardens, Gravesend to accommodate Cambria Thames Barge and other vessels

The Cabinet was requested to agree the funding of proposed moorings off St Andrew's Gardens for the Cambria Thames Barge with the possibility of extending the facility to other vessels of interest, together with the name of the facility.

Resolved that

- (1) the cost of providing four sets of moorings off St Andrew's Gardens, estimated at £20,500 be found from the Corporate Priorities Reserve;
- (2) the cost of annual mooring fees to the Port of London Authority (PLA) currently under negotiation but estimated at £2,000 pa be added to the General Fund Budget for 2011/12 onwards, in order to secure the management of this facility;
- (3) the area of the moorings be called St Andrew's Quay.

85. Town Pier Pontoon

The Cabinet was advised of the anticipated final pontoon project costs, on long term maintenance costs and on revenue income, together with an update on the pontoon's management.

Agreement was also sought to the Council entering into a contract for the provision of a pontoon and to enter into a contract for the pontoon's management and to make provision for regular review of options for the replacement of the pontoon at the end of its life.

Resolved that

- (1) the anticipated final project costs be noted;
- (2) the estimated long term maintenance costs be noted;
- (3) it be agreed that annual budgetary provision be made as proposed in paragraph 5.6 for the pontoon's maintenance to be paid in to a "Town Pier Pontoon Reserve";
- (4) it be agreed that the management of the pontoon be contracted to an external manager;

- (5) the proposed Management Agreement Heads of Terms contained in Appendix 1 be agreed;
- (6) subject to all appropriate due diligence checks, it be agreed to delegate the authority to enter into a management agreement with The Embankment Marina (Gravesend) Ltd. for the management of the Town Pier pontoon and St Andrew's Gardens moorings to the Assistant Director (Business & Law) in consultation with the Leader and Director (Business);
- (7) it be agreed that the Council enter in to a contract with Dean and Dyball for the provision of a pontoon off Town Pier, subject to all outstanding consents being in place;
- (8) it be agreed that 10-yearly reviews be carried out of options for the replacement of the pontoon at the end of its life;
- (9) the management company be encouraged to use the pontoon as a public landing stage for yachts and powered boats.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.