

Minutes of the meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held as a Teams Live Events remote meeting on Monday, 19 April 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C D Zosseder

Councillors: M Bates
S H Beer
T A Bond
S C Manion
J Rose
M Rose
R S Walkden
P Walker
H M Williams

Officers: Strategic Director (Corporate Resources)
Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial)
Head of Assets and Building Control
Head of Commercial Services
Head of Regulatory Services
Private Sector Housing Manager
Housing Improvements Officer
Democratic and Corporate Services Manager

114 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

115 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Democratic Services Manager advised that no notice had been received for the appointment of substitute members.

116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

117 MINUTES

The consideration of the Minutes was deferred at the request of the Democratic and Corporate Services Manager.

118 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The decisions of the Cabinet relating to recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 8 March 2021 were noted.

119 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL, CABINET, OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that there were no issues referred to the Committee by Council, Cabinet or another Committee.

120 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

There being no dissent indicated, it was agreed to note the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions.

121 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

Members identified the following items for inclusion in the work programme:

- Litter – with emphasis on street cleansing in the first instance and enforcement and community engagement in the second.
- Primary Care Services in the District
- Street Lighting – with attendance by KCC and DDC representatives

There being no dissent indicated, it was agreed to include the identified items with the work programme.

122 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

123 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

The Committee received a presentation from the Housing Improvement Officer in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

Members were informed that DFGs had been first introduced in 1989 and were a mandatory scheme to provide grants for adaptations. The maximum grant was for £30,000 and the average grant, which was means tested, was c.£12,500. Applications could be made by owners, occupiers and tenants (social and private sector) and the needs of the applicant would be assessed by an Occupational Therapist.

Eligible works included those related to improved access (in and around the dwelling), enabling food preparation and cooking, improvements to the heating system and works to make the dwelling safe.

An application would be made to Kent County Council Social Services in the first instance who would assess need and refer the application to Dover District Council. The applicant was responsible for arranging plans and quotes, though sometimes with the help of an agent. The Grants Officer at Dover District Council would consider the application and approve the grant for then the applicant/agent would be responsible for arranging the works. The Council received on average 100 applications per annum with the majority of applications being successful. Those with a high income could be ineligible for the scheme as it was means tested.

The Council also had the power to provide discretionary loans and grants and each local authority was required to publish a Housing Assistance Policy. For works over £30,000 this would be in the form of a loan.

Members were advised that the budget was £1.2 million in 2020/21.

It was acknowledged the means test was outdated but the Council had been able to expand its provision through a range of grants. However, the allocation of some of this funding had been adversely impacted by the covid pandemic.

The Council had made provision for the employment of an Occupational Therapist for two years. The direct employment of an Occupational Therapist was in line with many other district councils and was done in order to speed up the time it took to assess applications for DFGs. This role had previously been fulfilled by Kent County Council.

There being no dissent indicated, it was agreed to thank the officers for an informative presentation.

124 APPROVAL OF USE OF KEARSNEY ABBEY CONTINGENCY FUND

The Head of Commercial Services presented the report on the Approval of Use of Kearsney Abbey Contingency Fund.

The report sought approval to finance the overspend on the Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens Heritage Lottery Project from contingencies allocated in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to facilitate the completion of the project. The extra costs had arisen due to contractor delays; the impact of the covid pandemic; additional works to listed building fabric and landscape due to ground conditions and ecology; and contractor workmanship issues. It was expected that the income from the site would repay the cost of the contingency funding over time.

The lessons learnt from the project would be retained for the future and the results of the audit would be considered by the Governance Committee in due course. In the case of the impact of the covid pandemic it was pointed out to members that in normal circumstances no risk register would make provision for the impact of a global pandemic.

In response to a question concerning why there had not been a full structural survey undertaken prior to the works it was stated that with any conservation building the full extent of the work required was often not known until the works commenced.

Members expressed concerns over the inspection history of the building and the wider issue of general asset maintenance was discussed. The Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial) advised that the Council was managing its assets in accordance with the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that the Council had always been transparent about the resource constraints it faced.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet

- (a) That decision CAB109 be endorsed and that the overspend on the Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens project be financed from contingencies identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan, namely £250,000 from a specific contingency established for this project, and £100,000 from general contingencies.

- (b) That an investigation be undertaken as to why the project was not sufficient in respect of the pre-project survey data.
- (c) That the worst- and best-case scenarios be provided in respect of the costs for the project.
- (d) That the Council's asset maintenance programme be added to the work programme.

125 PUBLIC SECTOR DECARBONISATION FUND

The Head of Assets and Building Control presented the report on the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund.

Members were advised that the Council had been successful in its bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund and had secured a grant award of £830,000. The Council's bid was for works in relation to the Whitfield Offices and the Dover Museum as these were buildings that while currently using a lot of energy had the potential to be upgraded relatively easily. The overall cost of the project was expected to be £1,025,000.

The tight delivery timetable meant that the speed of decision-making was crucial to the success of the project and as a result the Cabinet had agreed to delegate to the Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property, the authority to take all necessary actions required to deliver the project.

Members discussed the tight timescale for delivering the project and questioned what the impact would be of another lockdown as a result of the covid pandemic. In response it was stated that it was felt that the risks to the project should be manageable.

The Council would consider applying to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund Part 2 for future funding but unless it had successfully bid to Part 1 of the Fund it would not be eligible for the next round of funding.

Members expressed support for the Head of Assets and Building Control in undertaking the project and offered their support for anything that would help mitigate the risks attached to the project.

It was moved by Councillor C D Zosseder, duly seconded by Councillor S H Beer, and

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet:

- (a) That CAB 108 be endorsed as follows:
 - (i) That the project to deliver carbon emission reductions at the Council's Whitfield Offices and the Dover Museum be approved.
 - (ii) That the procurement methodology outlined in the report be approved.

(iii) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property, to take all necessary actions to deliver the project, including the award of contract, contract variations and the approval of any necessary significant design changes.

(b) That the Asset Management Team be supported in mitigating risks in advance.

126 HOUSING STOCK COMPLIANCE

The Head of Assets and Building Control presented the sixth update report on Housing Stock Compliance.

The progress that had been made in respect of compliance compared to the start of the reports in October 2020 was welcomed.

Members discussed the compliance performance in respect of Fire Risk Assessments and smoke detectors and were advised that now that lockdown restrictions were easing it was becoming easier for contractors and suppliers to resume their full workloads. The target of 100% compliance was still expected to be achieved in June or July 2021.

There being no dissent indicated, it was agreed to note the report.

127 REFURBISHMENT OF DOVER DISCOVERY CENTRE

The Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial) presented the report on the Refurbishment of the Dover Discovery Centre.

Members were advised that the opportunity had arisen in conjunction with Kent County Council's (KCC) £7.45 million investment plans for the refurbishment of the Discovery Centre to undertake works to support the Dover Museum. The project would require an investment of £700,000 from the Council. The cost of the construction work had been determined proportionately based on the respective areas of the building.

The Museum and the Discovery Centre shared some mechanical and electrical services, which were common to both buildings and the internal property arrangements had seen elements of the building leased to the Council and KCC. As the Discovery Centre and the Museum were interlinked, the KCC proposals provided an opportunity to incorporate proposals within the design for a walk-in archive facility and education room within the DDC owned area and the co-location of the DDC and KCC local studies archive within a single space.

In response to a question about whether it would be better to demolish the building and start again, it was stated that this would be extremely costly due to the archaeology underneath, some of which was viewable in the building.

It was moved by Councillor C D Zosseder, duly seconded by Councillor S H Beer, and

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet that decision CAB 107 be endorsed as follows:

- (a) That the proposed investment by Kent County Council in the refurbishment of the Dover Discovery Centre be noted and welcomed.
- (b) That the proposal to include a walk-in archive facility and education room within the Dover District Council-owned area as part of the project be approved.
- (c) That the allocation of £700,000 from the Capital Programme to support the delivery of the project be approved.
- (d) That the Council enters into an agreement with Kent County Council to contribute the sum of £550,000 towards the cost of delivering the project.
- (e) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Corporate Property, to finalise agreements and the associated decisions involved in delivering the project.

128 DOVER TOWN REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Strategic Director (Operations and Commercial) presented the report. Members were advised that at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 12 April 2021 there had been an amendment to the wording of the recommendation.

It was moved by Councillor S H Beer, duly seconded by Councillor J Rose, and

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Cabinet that decision CAB 111 be endorsed and that, subject to the amendment of the last sentence under the section headed Scope to read ‘...to enhance the tourism and visitor economy, in particular in the hospitality and leisure sectors’, the proposed Terms of Reference for the Dover Town Regeneration Advisory Board, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

The meeting ended at 8.58 pm.