

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Zoom on Thursday 23 July 2020 at 1.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor J A Kite, MBE (Chairman)
Councillor C J Shippam (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs A D Allen, MBE
Councillor A R Lloyd
Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow
Councillor R J Wells

ALSO PRESENT: Sheri Green – Strategic Director (External Services)
Sarah Martin – Strategic Director (Internal Services)
Alan Twyman – Democratic Services Manager
Paul Blake – Interim Transformation Manager

127. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Cabinet, Councillor J A Kite, welcomed the Cabinet and viewers watching the meeting on YouTube.

128. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Brown.

129. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

130. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 25 JUNE 2020

The Cabinet considered the minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 25th June 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record.

131. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

132. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no references from other committees.

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133. POLICY FOR THE ACQUISITION OF PRIVATE PROPERTIES FOR COUNCIL HOUSING

The Strategic Director (External Services) presented the Council's proposed draft Policy for the Acquisition of Private Properties for Council Housing on the open market where the properties met certain criteria and to ensure value for money. The policy would link to the Council's Right-to-Buy receipts and assist in the management of the Council's 1-4-1 budget and would also complement and supplement the Council's new build housing policy. The acquisition of private properties for use as social housing would ensure that more family homes would be available for allocation to the people of Dartford in accordance with the Council's allocations policy

In response to questions the Strategic Director (External Services) confirmed that the Council could acquire any private property on the market and that acquisition was not limited to homes previously owned by the Council, although these could be more financially attractive, especially if the Council was exercising its right of first refusal on the sale of properties acquired by owners under Right-to-Buy, and also were likely to be in areas where the Council already had housing stock, making the properties easier to manage. Other properties located where the Council had housing stock were also more convenient for the same reason. Whilst properties so far acquired, of which there had been around half a dozen, had been for single tenancy it was possible that the Council could in future seek to buy properties for multiple occupancy which could assist with providing longer term accommodation for people that the Council had housed during the Coronavirus pandemic. The acquisition of properties depended on the availability of funding and could also help to ensure that the Council did not have to repay money to the Government where it had not been able to spend it on the new build programme during the required period as well as improving the availability of affordable housing for local people. Councillors were reassured that there was little scope for the acquisition process to be manipulated by sellers seeking to return properties to the Council at an inflated profit or by abusing Right-to-Buy for personal gain and furthermore, that the Council would only purchase properties with the benefit of vacant possession.

The Cabinet welcomed the opportunities to increase the provision of affordable housing for local people and the Council's enlightened approach to meeting this objective.

RESOLVED:

That, for the reasons outlined in the report, the draft Policy for the Acquisition of Private Properties for Council Housing, attached at Appendix A to the report, be endorsed.

134. ANNUAL REPORT FOR TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2019

The Cabinet considered the Housing Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders for 2019. The report, which had been produced in consultation

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with the Dartford Borough Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum, detailed the Council's achievements over the year against national housing standards and the targets for the coming year.

The Chairman welcomed the report and commented on the strong working relationship between the Council and its tenants and leaseholders which had developed during the past decade through genuine consultation and democratisation of the decision making processes. He thanked the representatives of the Tenants & Leaseholders Forum for their hard work and support and expressed his appreciation of the work of the Council's Housing Services Team.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Housing Annual Report 2019 for tenants and leaseholders, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

135. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21

The Strategic Director (Internal Services) presented a report which updated Members on financial performance against the 2020/21 budget to date for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. She advised the Cabinet that the Council had recently been allocated a further £203,000 by the Government to meet increased costs arising from the coronavirus pandemic bringing the total of Government funding for Dartford to £1.3M, over and above the £1M currently budgeted. The Government had also announced a scheme of support to mitigate lost income arising from the coronavirus measures with the Council bearing the first 5% of the loss compared to budget and the Government covering 75% of the remaining loss. Clarification had been received that this support would also apply to the cancellation of this years' management fee as a result of the closure of Fairfield Leisure Centre.

The Cabinet welcomed and noted the additional funding from the Government and thanked the Finance Department for their expertise and professionalism in the management of the Council's finances. The Chairman noted that Dartford was better placed than the vast majority of local authorities due to its cautious approach to financial management and determination to maintain sensible levels of reserves which could now be used diligently to mitigate the financial pressures arising from the pandemic.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the monitoring report update, attached at Appendix A to the report, for the year to date.

136. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2020/21

The Strategic Director (Internal Services) presented a report which detailed progress to date on the schemes in the approved Capital Programme for

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2020/21 and reported the latest position on capital resources. It was noted that there had been some slippage in the progress of capital projects but that the Government had relaxed some of the funding rules around 141 receipts to reflect this.

The Chairman noted that works in the town centre were progressing well with the first phase of works in Market Street due for completion in September and that the new car park at Acacia Hall should be in place by the end of the year.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet note the progress made to date on the 2020/21 Capital Programme.

137. POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES - 16 JUNE 2020

The Cabinet received the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on 16 June 2020.

The Chairman noted that the Committee had received presentations from health providers relating to the new health infrastructure in place across Kent and in the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley area arising from the creation of the Kent & Medway Clinical Commissioning Group from 1st April 2020. He welcomed the Committee's inclusion of this item as it was important for the Council to ask relevant questions of health services when new delivery arrangements were put in place and to assess their impact for the local community. He reflected on the considerable development and economic growth in Dartford but felt that whilst Council services, and those of other partners such as the county council and the police continued to keep pace with growth, he was less certain that health services were doing so. He felt that it was important for strategic NHS Managers to understand the need for greater investment in health service provision in Dartford to reflect the growing local economy.

The Cabinet noted that Dartford had a higher than average rate of coronavirus infections, possibly due to the presence of an excellent urgent care centre at Darent Valley Hospital drawing in patients from surrounding areas and the proximity to London. It was uncertain as to whether other factors such as smoking and poor air quality contributed to this as much was still unknown about the disease but it was possible that lifestyle, race and gender could all impact on the likelihood of infection and the severity of symptoms. The Chairman stressed the importance of continuing to address poor air quality in parts of the borough and the need to keep pressure on the Government and Highways England to take measures to mitigate this and to build the proposed new Thames crossing in Gravesham.

The Chairman expressed his huge appreciation of the work carried out by health and care workers, and all key workers, in tackling the coronavirus pandemic and hoped that this might inspire local people to consider careers in these professions in the future within Dartford.

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RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on 16 June 2020 be noted.

The meeting closed at 2.18 pm

Councillor J A Kite, MBE
CHAIRMAN

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