

Cabinet Meeting	
Meeting Date	12 June 2019
Report Title	Coalition priorities: update and next steps
Cabinet Member	Cllr Roger Truelove – Council Leader
SMT Lead	David Clifford
Head of Service	Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services
Lead Officer	
Key Decision	Discussion paper only, not for decision
Classification	Open
Recommendations	Cabinet is asked to note progress towards the coalition’s priorities to date, and to review and discuss next steps. This report is not for formal decision.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates cabinet on progress towards the coalition’s priorities to date, and invites members to review and discuss the most appropriate next steps.

2 Background

- 2.1 Following the election of the new council leader on 22 May, the five-group coalition administration has set out its political priorities, and officers have begun to work through these with a view to producing a revised corporate plan (or equivalent) to cover the period to 2023.
- 2.2 This discussion paper sets out progress made to date on these political priorities, together with a sense of the likely next steps. It also draws members’ attention to any potential issues which officers have identified under each of the priorities in terms of the need to make rapid progress on them, and invites members’ views on these.

3 Discussion

Constitution review

- 3.1 The deputy leader has met with the monitoring officer to set out the aims of the review, and the immediate next step is for an ‘objectives and options’ paper to go to policy development and review committee in July to inform a discussion there. Several councils around the country have taken advantage of the flexibility in the Localism Act 2011 to move away from the leader-and-cabinet model, so the paper will draw on their experiences to help members develop their ideas. In order formally to effect a return to the committee system, council will need to pass

a resolution to that end, probably in October, and the new constitution would then be adopted and come into force at the next annual council meeting in May.

- 3.2 Members are keen that the new arrangements should strengthen residents' opportunities to participate in council decision-making, and this is one factor which the review will need to accommodate. However, there will also be a need for strong public consultation as part of the review process itself, so the July PDRC paper will invite discussion of this.
- 3.3 Other factors which the review will need to consider carefully include the extent to which the council is willing to increase the cost of transacting its business by having more individuals and more meetings involved in decision-making, and how the council can strengthen the coherence of its decision-making (for example on cross-cutting issues such as health and sustainability) while diffusing power more widely. None of these issues needs to be insurmountable, but they do require careful thought. It is likely that some additional temporary resource will be required to conduct the review with sufficient rigour, consultation and attention to detail.

Local plan

- 3.4 Members and officers have met to discuss the vision and approach to local plan-making going forwards. It has been agreed that the local plan panel meeting on 6 June will be an opportunity for members to have an unconstrained and in-principle discussion of strategic options, in order both to help planning officers better to understand members' preferences and to enable panel members to gain a better sense of each other's perspectives. The s106 agreement on the Wises Lane application has been deferred until July.
- 3.5 All political groups represented in the chamber seem to be agreed that issues around spatial planning were a key concern of residents at the recent election, and the coalition has a very clear local mandate for change. The challenge now will be for members and officers to work together either to interpret that mandate within the constraints imposed by central government and/or to determine the extent to which those constraints can be challenged without undue risk to the council and the borough.

Climate emergency

- 3.6 The cabinet member for the environment met with relevant officers to begin to draw up a future work programme on 28 May, and will be able to update members verbally at the cabinet meeting.

Housing

- 3.7 The leader, the cabinet member and the deputy cabinet member have all met with the head of housing, economy and community services to begin to set out the vision for the council's role in housing over the next few years. Much of the analytical work which was recently completed to inform the development of the

housing, homelessness and rough sleeping strategy remains valid and useful, but work has now begun to review the interpretation of this in order for an updated version of the strategy to come to cabinet in July. This analytical work also resulted in recommendations to reconfigure the way the housing options service is delivered, and this is also due to be progressed.

- 3.8 Following preliminary discussions with members, officers have begun to consider residential options for Sittingbourne High Street and how these could be brought forward through the master-planning process, as well as options for key sites in the borough. Officers are also arranging for preliminary meetings to be held between relevant members and the borough's housing providers.

Community inclusion and safety

- 3.9 The cabinet member and deputy cabinet member have met with the head of housing, economy and community services to develop priorities for the years ahead. The CCTV strategy is due to come to cabinet in July.

Health

- 3.10 The cabinet member for health and wellbeing met with relevant officers to discuss priorities on 28 May, and will be able to update members verbally at the cabinet meeting. Officers have drawn up a draft job description for a health and wellbeing officer post, based on the brief discussion held with cabinet members on 14 May.
- 3.11 Officers are keen to move quickly on this recruitment, as the recruitment is more likely to be successful if it can be completed before the summer period. Pending the cabinet member's approval of the job description, the intention is to take this to the council's job evaluation panel for a grading decision in early June so that the job can be advertised shortly afterwards.

Economy and skills

- 3.12 The cabinet member for economy and property has met with the head of housing, economy and community services to begin to establish vision and priorities for the years ahead, including on town centres, tourism and the council's portfolio of property assets.
- 3.13 Officers have begun to undertake research into the costs and feasibility of becoming a living wage employer. Initial findings are that this would affect only a small number of the council's own employees and could thus probably be implemented quickly.
- 3.14 The matter is more complex in respect of the council's contractors, not only because of the costs involved but also because employment risk in council contracts is generally with the contractor, which means that the council often has no contractual right to determine wage levels. It is however very unlikely that this will turn out to be an insuperable issue, and a report will come to cabinet in July

setting out more detail on options and timescales for implementation, as well as likely costs.

Public realm and open spaces

- 3.15 The leader and cabinet member for the environment have met with the head of commissioning, environment and leisure services to ascertain priorities and discuss the constraints on capital spend. The intention for the initial stages is for the policy development and review committee to be heavily involved in the selection of projects, and a preliminary discussion will be had with the committee very shortly. Depending on the outcome of the constitution review, it is expected at this stage that this role will be taken over by area committees or equivalent in future years.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 This report makes no recommendation to agree a specific proposal, so there are no alternative options at this stage.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 As this is a discussion paper only, there has been no public consultation on it. As part of the constitution review, the coalition aims to improve transparency and accountability by enhancing public participation in council decision-making. It is expected that this will require improved and/or more extensive mechanisms for public consultation.

6 Implications

- 6.1 Cross-cutting implications have not been fully analysed at this stage because the report is for discussion only and does not contain any recommendations for decision.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 There are no appendices.

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 There are no background papers.