

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 15th January 2014

Present: Councillor Ian Jelley (Chair)
Councillors Steve Bellamy, Michael Brown, Mark Dearing,
Jan Smith and Derek Zanger.

Also Present Councillors David Bishop, Lloyd Bunday, Terry Freer,
Shirley Lynch and Cliff Moreton

13.EX.53 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Roberts and Lamb, David Cook (Chief Executive) and Julia Becket (Deputy Chief Executive).

13.EX.54 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th December 2013 be approved and signed as a correct record.

13.EX.55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mark Dearing declared a personal interest in Items 11 and 12 on the agenda as a private sector landlord.

13.EX.56 THE COUNCIL'S WORK PROGRAMME

The draft Work Programme published on 13th January 2014 was noted, having been previously emailed to members.

13.EX.57 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2014/15 AND PREPARING FOR THE MEDIUM TERM

A report was submitted which:

- (a) outlined the draft budget figures for the Council's three main accounts for 2014/15 (to start the formal budget consultation process);
- (b) considered the main issues that were likely to impact on the Council's budgets in the medium term including changes to major funding regimes for local authorities;
- (c) provided an illustration of the Council's medium term financial projections.

A replacement page 32 to the report was circulated at the meeting, giving updated figures in respect of the medium term financial savings.

The report was supplemented with a presentation by the Acting Head of Finance. Members were reminded that the Budget Consultation meeting would be held on 23rd January.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance reported that £6.78m of efficiency savings had been made since 2010, which represented two-thirds of the Council's net budget. It was noted that average Council tax in Kettering had been maintained below the national average at £3.00 per week. The Council had also maintained its overall support for the voluntary sector and there had been no cuts to front-line services.

In discussion, members welcomed the budget proposals and made the following comments:-

- Shop occupancy rates in Kettering had improved following investment in the town centre
- Investment of £250,000 to progress the next phase of Public Realm works in Kettering to improve flow of traffic in Gold Street and improvements in Newland Street was welcomed
- Investment in the use of the Council's big screen for more events in 2014 was noted
- The popularity of two pilot schemes running during the past year in respect of car parking charges was welcomed and it was noted that car parking charges would be kept under review as part of the budget process

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the current budget position for 2013/14 be noted;
- (ii) the savings that the budget delivery framework had generated to set a balanced budget for 2014/15 be recognised;
- (iii) the draft budgets for 2014/15 (as contained in the separate budget booklet) be referred to Scrutiny for comment in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

13.EX.58 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY

A report was submitted which set out the Council's approach to dealing with sub-standard housing conditions in the private sector.

Councillor David Bishop addressed the Committee, stating that he was pleased to note the robust quality of the report and scheme. However, he expressed some concern regarding staffing resources to comply with government guidelines and enforcement action in respect of the safe houses policy and the financial implications if the Council itself took action against private sector landlords. He also expressed concern in relation to the potential for landlords to evict tenants who complained and the need to ensure that complaints were from the right people at the right time.

In discussion, it was noted that there should be a better understanding of the performance of private sector landlords with the introduction of the new policy. There had been a small increase in overall staffing in the Housing Services unit. Only 20 cases had been taken forward last year from 105 complaints made. Should building works be required as a result of enforcement action, member approval would be required for any significant expenditure. It was hoped that by ensuring complaints were dealt with in a sensitive manner this would minimise the potential for revenge evictions by landlords. If appropriate, the Council did engage in joint enforcement action with other organisations such as the Police, the Fire Service and Border Agency and such actions had proved to be very effective.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised the Committee that the Council was looking to work more closely with private sector

landlords and ensure that people were fully aware of the standards. The success of the recent Landlord Information event was noted.

RESOLVED that the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy be adopted.

13.EX.59 HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

A report was submitted which sought approval of the revised Housing Allocations Scheme, which underpinned the allocation of social rented homes to households in housing need in the Borough.

Councillor David Bishop addressed the Committee stating that the revisions to the scheme were welcomed, particular in relation to overcrowding. He expressed concern that tenants may be paying off housing debt with payday loans or other expensive forms of finance and also that a high percentage of applicants had not reapplied for housing under the new scheme. Councillor Bishop also expressed concern regarding the shortage of 1-bed homes when a high proportion of applications were for single accommodation.

In discussion, it was noted that staff did ask questions about the source of finance if a tenant was paying off housing debt, but there was a need to balance the source of income being used for this purpose against the need for people to pay off their debts. One reason for the reduction in the number of people reapplying for housing was thought to be that applicants had moved-on or had secured housing elsewhere. Verification of applications was now being carried out at the point of application rather than when an applicant was allocated a property, with extensive documentary evidence as to eligibility being required.

It was noted that work was being carried out to address the shortfall in single accommodation. This included talking to Housing Associations and looking at where the Council's own property could be converted. The Council was also working with credit unions and had included within its budget a sum of money for debt advice.

In response to a question, it was noted that allocation of housing to the Armed Forces was still part of the Allocation policy.

RESOLVED that the revised Housing Allocation Scheme be adopted with immediate effect.

13.EX.60 BROUGHTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

A report was submitted which informed Members of the consultation on the Broughton Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation and sought designation of the Parish of Broughton as the Broughton Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Discussion was held on the source of finance for work in relation to the Neighbourhood Planning process and it was noted that central government funding was available throughout the process, with £5k available upon designation and further funding later to help fund the costs of consultation and referendum.

RESOLVED that the consultation on the Broughton Neighbourhood Plan Area be noted and the Parish of Broughton (as shown on the plan appended to the report) be designated as the Broughton Neighbourhood Plan Area.

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 7.48 pm)

Signed
Chair

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