

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 22nd April 2014

Present: Councillor Paul Marks (Chair)
Councillor Dave Bishop
Councillor Maggie Don
Councillor Cliff Moreton
Councillor David Soans
Councillor Margaret Talbot
Councillor Mike Tebbutt

13.RD.28 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Hakewill and Jenny Henson. It was noted that Councillors Mike Tebbutt and Cliff Moreton were acting as substitutes respectively.

13.RD.29 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29th January 2014 be approved and signed as a correct record by the chair.

13.RD.30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Maggie Don declared an interest in Item A2 as a member of the management committee for Accommodation Concern

Councillor Cliff Moreton declared an interest in Item A2 as a private landlord.

13.RD.31 HIGH SPEED 2 TASK AND FINISH GROUP (A1)

A report was submitted which sought consideration of the findings made by the High Speed 2 (HS2) Task and Finish group and requested that these be recommended to the meeting of the Executive Committee on 7th May.

Members noted that the Task and Finish Group had been

identified for inclusion on the Committee's work programme at the meeting of the Committee in December 2013, with the aims and objectives of the group reiterated to the meeting. The group met on four occasions between February and April, receiving evidence from seven external organisations to assist in the forming of the resultant action plans as detailed in the report.

It was further noted that prior to the finalisation of the Task and Finish Group report, Network Rail had announced a £38bn, five year plan of investment that included improvements with a direct benefit to the borough. These included:

- Electrification of Midland Mainline (MML) northwards to Sheffield
- Electric Spine Development Programme
- East-West Rail Project between Oxford and Bedford

It was considered that lobbying to ensure electrification of MML to Toton was of paramount importance, with a reinforced message that Kettering was a growth area in terms of employment and housing. It was vital that work was undertaken with other organisations to ensure these messages were heard at the highest level.

Members congratulated officers for their work and noted the interest taken by neighbouring local authorities in the work of the group.

RESOLVED that

(i) the conclusions in the Task and Finish Group's report be adopted.

(ii) That work be undertaken with East Midlands Councils (EMC) to find a compatible approach that provided effective lobbying; and

(ii) to use KBC's positions on NEP and SEMLEP to influence their future plans to better promote, as part of the economic growth of the area, the need for rail networks to serve the area.

(iii) That the Executive Committee be asked to endorse these conclusions as Council policy.

13.RD.32 **THE FUTURE OF THE HOUSING MARKET IN KETTERING (A2)**

Two presentations were provided to the meeting, the first by

John Conway, Head of Housing, on the subject of The Changing Housing Market in Kettering. The second presentation was given by Rachel Wilson on behalf of Accommodation Concern

Members noted that introduction of bedroom size criteria in April 2013 had led to a variety of changes relating to KBC's social housing provision. Larger properties were proving more difficult to let; the number of applicants on the housing waiting list had fallen to a tenth of those in 2012, but contacts regarding homelessness had doubled from 500 to 1,000 a month. As a result of these changes, work had been undertaken to understand the nature of the changing housing market.

The meeting noted the main aspects to the changes affecting the borough.

- The demographic of the borough had altered significantly; overall population had increased by 14%, with total households up by 15% in the last ten years. A significant increase in single households and one-parent families was noted, with the elderly and disabled people living longer and more independent lives.
- Home ownership levels had fallen rapidly; house prices in Kettering had risen 5% in the last year, with the average house price being approximately £180k, five times the average annual household income in the borough.
- Private rented properties now accounted for nearly a quarter of homes in Kettering.
- Fewer new homes were being constructed and the supply of social housing was no longer sufficient to cope with demand. Social housing tenancies were seen as less attractive and more difficult to obtain.
- An increase in homelessness was noted, with 44 households in temporary accommodation compared to 33 in October 2013. Rough sleeping was a major cause for concern, with an estimated 11 rough sleepers in the borough in November 2013 compared with only one individual in 2011. Cuts to supported housing budgets for individuals with complex needs increased the risk of homelessness.
- Supply and demand - 60% of people on the housing register were either single or part of a childless couple. Only 25% of KBC housing stock comprised 1 bedroom properties. Larger properties were now taking an average of five advertisement cycles to find a bidder.
- Private landlords were able to provide customers with a wider choice of property types and areas. The gap between social housing and private sector rents had virtually been eradicated as a result of successive rent rises above inflation.

Members noted that council housing was now a business, with a requirement to fill properties and collect rent; however there remained a social purpose. KBC was in direct competition with Housing Associations and private landlords and methods identified to respond to the challenge are listed below:-

- Boosting resources in income management, tenancy support and homelessness sections
- A Tenants' Open Day had been a resounding success
- Highfield Road Open Day
- A more professional manner of marketing properties
- Remodelling of existing housing stock and investigation into the possibility of creating new housing stock

Rachel Wilson attended from Accommodation Concern (AC) to provide an additional presentation on the works undertaken, and challenges faced by the organisation.

Members heard that AC was an anti-poverty charity, founded in Kettering in 1987 and best known for its work with the homeless and those in housing need. Over 160 households in Kettering were on support schemes annually, with walk in advice provided for 700 households per year. Overall, the organisation helped prevent homelessness for over 1,800 Kettering residents annually.

The largest group of service users were those affected by the threat of homelessness, and details of the services currently available to them were detailed. Future plans included peer mentoring and use of skilled volunteers, with plans to agree a one month protocol with local housing providers in order for support to be provided to tenants in rent arrears.

In regard to the supply of affordable homes to meet local need, AC hoped to be in a position to lease 3-bed properties from housing providers to then let to three individuals who would receive tenancy support from the organisation.

It was noted that the private rented sector was extremely expensive to access, and tenancies were not always secure. Future plans included the formation of a private sector tenants association and use of social lettings agencies.

Council Housing was still the tenure of choice for the majority of AC service users due to affordability, security of tenure and a good reputation for completion of repairs in timely fashion.

Supporting vulnerable and elderly people was key to the work of

the organisation, with plans to utilise the knowledge of local residents as part of Kettering Together and run inter-generational projects.

Future challenges for the organisation included rising demand for services, with over 1,000 contacts a month. Sustainable funding and stronger partnerships were required to continue to balance the needs of vulnerable service users with available services and accessible housing stock. Members heard that Supporting People funding was in danger of being lost by the organisation, with the funding contract currently up for tender.

Members asked questions on the following topics:

- Remodelling of existing KBC housing stock
- Construction of sustainable wood-framed houses
- Conversion of commercial properties owned by KBC to accommodation
- Reviewing the Keyways allocation system to examine a broader base approach
- Success of the HomeMove scheme
- KBC Right to Buy scheme
- Potential loss of Supporting People funding and the tender for a new contract
- KBC engagement with Kettering Together

13.RD.33 WORK PROGRAMME (A3)

The work programme was noted.

Suggested items for inclusion on the work programme included:

- The experience and future of residents parking schemes
- The impact of new car parking charges
- Dog control and dog walks
- Community Halls – usage, costs and income
- Crematorium – Tour of premises for members
- Summer events and play schemes

Members were advised that :

- a) information regarding Summer Events and play schemes would be disseminated to them following the meeting.
- b) Tours were to be arranged of the new facilities at the crematorium during the summer
- c) Some of these items were within the remit of the Monitoring and Audit Committee and the right destination for each item would be determined after the meeting.

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8:50pm)

Signed

Chair

DJP