

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

RURAL FORUM

Meeting held: 2nd February 2017

Present:

Borough Councillors

Councillor Jim Hakewill (*Chair*)
Councillor David Howes
Councillor Mark Rowley
Councillor Anne Lee (Kettering Town Forum Representative)
Councillor Ian Jelley (On behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Finance)

County Councillors

Councillor Christopher Groome
Councillor Allan Matthews

Parish Councillors

Councillor Brent Woodford (Ashley)
Councillor George Normand (Braybrooke)
Councillor Robin Shrive (Broughton)
Councillor Hilary Bull (Broughton)
Councillor Richard Barnwell (Great Cransley & Mawsley)
Councillor Ray Brooks (Desborough TC)
Councillor Alan Garrett (Dingley)
Councillor Doug Hodgkinson (Geddington, Newton & Lt. Oakley)
Councillor David Watson (Geddington, Newton & Lt. Oakley)
Councillor Paul Gooding (Harrington)
Councillor Andrew Macredie (Pytchley)
Councillor Fay Foster (Pytchley)
Councillor Peter Hooton (Rushton)
Councillor Frances Pope (Thorpe Malsor)
Councillor James Woolsey (Warkton)
Councillor Paul Wharin (Warkton)
Councillor Brian Peel (Weekly)
Councillor Nick Richards (Wilbarston)
Stephen Chester (Orton Parish Meeting)
Bernard Rengger (Sutton Bassett Parish Meeting)

Also Present:

Lisa Hyde (Kettering Borough Council)
Sue Lyons (Kettering Borough Council)
Mark Dickinson (Kettering Borough Council)
Rob Harbour (Kettering Borough Council)
Brendan Coleman (Kettering Borough Council)
Pina Patel (Kettering Borough Council)
Peter Chaplin (Kettering Borough Council)
Serena Penney (Kettering Borough Council)
David Pope (Forum Administrator-KBC)

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16.RF.45 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Councillors Ian Bushby, Sally McKeown and Nick Richards. Apologies were also received from Weston by Welland Parish Council.

16.RF.46 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

16.RF.47 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Rural Forum held on 1st December 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16.RF.48 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

None

16.RF.49 **DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2017/18 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

Mark Dickenson and Pina Patel attended the meeting and provided the forum with an overview of the budget setting process, the position with the 2016/17 budget, the budget for 2017/18 and the preparation involved in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The meeting heard that the Draft Budget for 2017/18 had been presented to the Executive Committee at its meeting on 18th January, signalling the start of the consultation process. The draft budget would be considered by the Council's scrutiny committees, the Budget Consultation meeting and geographic forums, with questions and comments received as part of the process submitted to the Executive Committee on 15th February. A recommendation would then be made to Council for consideration and approval alongside the setting of 2017/18 Council Tax rates. This meeting had originally been scheduled for

22nd February but had been moved to 1st March to allow for the county council budget setting.

The Council had utilised the budget delivery framework to identify approximately £1.5m of savings to realise and set a balanced budget for 2016/17. All the identified savings were being successfully delivered.

The Draft Budget for 2017/18 included a reduction in central government grant of £568,000 (16.3%), broadly in line with what had been modelled. In total, it was estimated that £1.38m of savings would be required to achieve a balanced budget for 2017/18. As in 2016/17, savings had been identified using the Council's budget delivery framework, with the largest saving identified as a result of staff suggestions and service innovations. Additional income would also be derived from an increase in Business Rates through pooling arrangements and growth within the Borough, New Homes Bonus and increased service demand.

The forum noted that setting the draft budget was a paper exercise, and there was a need to ensure delivery of that draft, for which KBC had an excellent track record, even in the face of significant financial pressures.

When considering Council Tax for 2017/18 and going forward, members needed to consider what represented a sustainable strategy. Council tax levels had been frozen by KBC for the previous six years, although there was no longer any government incentive to continue this policy.

In the medium term, KBC had accepted a multi-year grant settlement to 2019/20, which allowed core levels of grant to be incorporated into the MTFS. Prior to considering changes to Council Tax levels, KBC would be required to make average savings of over £1 million a year up to 2019/20, in addition to the £11 million of savings achieved since 2010. It was noted that KBC had closed this gap without increasing Council Tax, cutting frontline services or voluntary sector funding.

The meeting heard that the council's MTFS would continue to be reviewed and amended in future as it progressed, although it was noted that there was still a significant task ahead.

The forum asked the following questions:-

Item / Issue	Summary of Response Given
<p>On page 26 of the full budget, one of the technical accounting adjustments is for a capital expenditure of £777,000 for which no capital asset is created. I do not understand how there can be capital expenditure with no capital asset. What is in that £777,000 and why is added back to the budget as if it has never been spent in first place?</p> <p>(Cllr David Watson, Geddington, Newton and Little Oakley Parish Council)</p>	<p>That amount relates to disabled facility grants for capital expenditure on individual properties adapted to meet individual's needs. It is an anomaly with local government finances. The council is bound by legislative requirements to account for things in a certain way; this expenditure is called REFCUS (Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital Under Statue). REFCUS expenditure is captured in the Capital programme but passes through the revenue account; it has no impact on the bottom line.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>

16.RF.50

TOWN AND PARISH NOTIFICATIONS OF PLANNING RELATED APPLICATIONS

It was reported that just prior to Christmas, an email had been sent to all town and parish councils advising that all future notifications of planning applications from KBC's Planning Department would be sent electronically, effective from 1st January 2017. The Chair of the Rural Forum had requested that this proposal not be implemented from this date in order to first discuss the matter with affected councils.

The Head of Development Services attended the meeting and stated that the purpose of this item was to commence a consultation with parishes in regard to the proposals.

The forum noted that in 2012, 38% of planning applications had been submitted electronically by the applicant, this figure had now risen significantly to around 70%.

A number of reasons were provided for the proposed change:-

- Public sector finance was under increasing pressure and

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officers had a duty to examine business processes to ensure services operated in a cost effective manner. Direct costs such as printing and postage and indirect costs of staff time could realise a cost saving if the notification process was made electronic.

- Consultation periods for planning applications ran for 21 days and, under the current system, time was lost to parishes whilst awaiting posted documentation. Electronic consultations would be instantaneous.
- Occasionally posted documentation never arrived with the intended recipient. This possibility was dramatically reduced under an electronic system.
- KBC was the only local authority locally not currently operating an electronic planning consultation system.

Officers were keen to receive feedback from parishes as to how they believed electronic consultation would work for them and how best to overcome any perceived obstacles.

The proposed notification process was outlined to the meeting. Upon receipt of a planning application, an email would be sent out to the parish or town clerk or a nominated recipient, within which would be letter containing headline details of the application, planning reference numbers and a link to the planning section of the KBC website where all documentation relating to the application could be accessed.

It was heard that although not completely open ended, a deadline for consultation responses could be flexible dependent on how long councils required to either provide feedback or to move forward with adopting the proposal. It was noted that town and parish councils would be written to as a result of feedback received and responses would be used to inform how the proposal progressed.

A number of parishes considered the proposals in a positive light, although it was reported that the existing planning portal on the website was at times cumbersome and slow, with difficulties in viewing schematic plans noted by officers. In response, it was heard that KBC was in the process of building a new website that was due to go live during 2017 that would hopefully result in improved functionality.

It was requested that a “read-receipt” function be employed as part of the new system so both parties would be aware that emails were being received and viewed. The IT department would be consulted as part of any scheme introduced.

Parishes raised the issue of larger applications and applications requiring detailed plans that may not be practical to view online or to print out at small sizes. It was also heard that parishes with low technological capabilities may be at a disadvantage under the new system. It was also considered that accessing planning information online might not be practical at parish meetings due to a lack of broadband provision at meeting rooms. The forum was advised that NCALC still administered a grant that town and parish councils could apply for that could be used towards the costs of upgrading of IT equipment.

Following discussion it was

RH/PC

AGREED that planning officers would take away the feedback received from the forum and would write to parishes individually regarding the proposals, with suggestions on how to deal with issues and obstacles raised. A reasonable timeframe would be considered and included within the letter, although if specific councils wished to make the switch to electronic notifications of planning applications, that could be implemented immediately.

16.RF.51

FLY-TIPPING

The Chair raised the issue of fly-tipping and queried whether forum members considered that there had been a greater occurrence of incidents across the district in the previous few months.

Brendan Coleman, the Head of Environmental Care Services stated that fly-tipping incidents had decreased year on year. The forum was advised that new working practices in association with the Environmental Health team had resulted in a more intelligence-led process when dealing with fly-tipping. All incidents were now mapped electronically and categorised by type of item dumped. A total of 1200 offences had been committed in the previous year, with furniture and mattresses the most common items fly-tipped.

The meeting noted that the council had a good reputation for swiftly removing fly-tipped items, although such efficiency had resulted in continued dumping of items. A new strategy involved putting high-visibility stickers on fly-tipped items for a period of time prior to their removal, advising the council was investigating

the offence. This tactic had had a positive impact and fly-tipped items had often been removed before the council returned to remove them.

It was reported that work with local organisations in regard to the correct disposal of waste material was ongoing and had had a positive impact on fly-tipping of specific items such as tyres. In addition, carriers of waste were spot-checked to ensure they had the correct licences.

The meeting noted that KBC was working alongside the countywide group in utilising CCTV facilities to target known hotspots. It was hoped that funding could be found to allow for the purchase of KBC-owned surveillance equipment which could be used to tackle rural fly-tipping.

The forum thanked Brendan and his team for their work in dealing with fly-tipping and it was requested that the topic be brought to the next meeting of the forum in June, when further statistics and details of any prosecutions could be supplied.

Members asked questions in relation to fly-tipping offences on private land, tyre disposal and the effectiveness of high visibility stickers on dumped items. It was noted that checks would be undertaken with colleagues at the county council to ascertain whether civic amenity sites accepted tyres for disposal from members of the public.

BC

Following discussion it was

AGREED that the topic would be brought to the June meeting of the forum

BC

16.RF.52 RURAL POSTAL SERVICE OPERATION

Following the forum's request at its previous meeting for assurances in regard to rural postal deliveries and collections, an email response had been received from Royal Mail Customer Services and this had been supplied to all members.

Key points of the email included a commitment from the service to undertake deliveries in rural areas every day by 4.00pm and that an additional 2,000 collection boxes would be installed across the country, predominantly in rural locations.

Should there be any specific issues regarding postal deliveries or

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collections, parishes now had a contact point at Royal Mail that could be used to seek further assurance.

16.RF.53 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER MEETING FEEDBACK

Feedback was provided by Stephen Chester and Cllr James Woolsey in relation to a meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Northamptonshire held on 6th January 2017. A number of other forum members had attended a meeting with the PCC at Wootton Hall on 26th January.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the policing and visibility of officers in rural areas, and whether the views of rural residents were being listened to. Particular concerns were raised in regard to the non-attendance of police when contacted regarding burglary offences and the perceived lack of priority that crime type had in the overall police crime strategy.

The forum also raised the issue of information sharing between police and local authorities to allow damaged public property to be repaired at expense of person that damaged it.

Following discussion it was

AGREED that a letter be drafted to the Chief Constable and the PCC, including NALC to state:- **Chair/DJP**

- i) that the rural community wished to know whether its views were genuinely being listened to by police and the PCC
- ii) To raise concerns regarding attendance of police at crimes such as burglary
- iii) Whether police visibility was being affected due to the weight of resources aimed at tackling cyber-crime; and
- iv) To extend an invitation to the Chief Constable to the next meeting of the forum in order to answer issues raised in the letter outlined above

Parishes were requested to forward any comments for inclusion in the letter to the Chair. A copy of the letter would be emailed to Philip Hollobone MP.

16.RF.54 **POLICE STATISTICS**

The police statistics were taken as read, although the forum noted that the crime resolution rate was inaccurate.

16.RF.42 **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The following items were noted for future meetings of the Forum:-

- Fly-tipping
- Funding Village Plans
- Report from the A6 Towns Representative

16.RF.44 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS AND SUGGESTED VENUES**

It was noted that the date for the next meeting of the forum was provisionally set for 29th June 2017. Offers were made from Warkton and Geddington to host the meeting.

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 9:05pm)

Signed

Chair

DJP