

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 7th February 2017

Present: Councillor Duncan Bain (Chair)

Councillors Jim Hakewill, Jenny Henson, Mike Tebbutt and
Greg Titcombe

Also Present:

Lisa Hyde	(Executive Director)
Mark Dickenson	(Head of Resources)
Dean Mitchell	(Group Accountant)
Brendan Coleman	(Head of Environmental Care Services)
Sarah Parr	(Grounds Services Manager)
Shirley Plenderleith	(Head of Environmental Health)
Jon Hall	(Environmental Protection Manager)
David Pope	(Committee Administrator)

16.RD.26 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cedwien Brown and Martin Hammond

16.RD.27 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Research and Development Committee held on 7th December 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16.RD.28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Greg Titcombe declared a personal interest in Item 8 – A3 and A4.

16.RD.29 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2017/18 AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (A1)

A report was submitted which considered the Council's draft budget proposals and medium term financial forecast and sought comments for reporting back to the Council's Executive for consideration at its

meeting on 15th February 2017.

The Head of Resources and Group Accountant attended the meeting and summarised the key elements of the report.

It was noted that comments had also been sought from the geographic forums, the Tenants' Forum and the Monitoring and Audit Committee. The formal consultation period would run until the 1st March when the budget would be formally considered by full Council.

Members of the Committee submitted comments as follows:-

Item / Issue	Summary of Response Given
<p>Within the Housing Revenue Account, there seems to be too much budgeted for the General Management fund compared to the budget for Repairs and Maintenance.</p> <p>(Cllr Greg Titcombe)</p>	<p>General Management within the HRA budget primarily covers the cost of managing the Council's 3,700 residential properties. The Repairs and Maintenance amounts to £3.8m this relates to ad hoc work and the Capital programme amounts to £4.0m, this relates to pre-planned works.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p> <p>General Management includes the cost of the staff involved in lettings, estate management, rent and service charge collection, the management of anti-social behaviour, tenant participation, sheltered housing and tenancy support for vulnerable tenants. In addition, utility payments, support costs and initiatives such as HomeMove are funded from the HRA management budgets.</p> <p>Additional Response</p>
<p>Within the General Fund and the Composition of Framework Savings for 2017/18 is £146,000 for various other savings which conveniently is the exact figure needed to make the savings add up. What does that include and can you provide an assessment as to whether it is deliverable or not?</p> <p>(Cllr Mick Scrimshaw)</p>	<p>It most definitely is deliverable. The £146,000 is a combination of reductions in expenditure and increased income. An example is changes to printing arrangements within the organisation. We have shown the major changes and the various savings which consist of smaller efficiency savings have been identified in full.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>
<p>In the budget booklet, Page 13, point 29 - Recycling supplies and services, it shows a massive increase above the 2016/17 original budget because a fire at one of our partner organisations we normally use meant we had to go elsewhere. There are concerns as recycling costs generally are increasing, has this been allowed for? Is there a contingency built into budget line allowing for increased costs you might not be aware of?</p> <p>(Cllr Mick Scrimshaw)</p>	<p>The costs we have for 2016/17 reflect changes to operational arrangements as a result of a large fire at a third party sorting centre. We are anticipating that the new arrangements will be up and running for the new financial year and that is why the budget for 2017/18 is aligned to the 2016/17 original budget. We produce regular reports on variations in the recycling market and track these as this is one of the key risks faced by the organisation.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>

Item / Issue	Summary of Response Given
<p>There are increased pressures in relation to homelessness; we used to get a government grant, is that no longer received?</p> <p>How does any loss of grant relate to the golden principle where if a specific grant funding a specific service is withdrawn, the service stops?</p> <p>(Cllr Mick Scrimshaw)</p>	<p>The homelessness grant was previously separately identified; this grant has now been rolled up into the overall formula grant. Homelessness is a statutory service that is demand led. We have reflected the pressures in 2016/17 into the 2017/18 draft budget. This issue is not something that is unique to Kettering it is a national pressure.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>
<p>In the budget booklet, Page 4, point 2 – Community Centres, the council will overspend on the original budget, but next year we are budgeting £10,000 less, mainly due to cuts in staffing. Are you confident there will be no cuts to service and savings will therefore be deliverable?</p> <p>(Cllr Mick Scrimshaw)</p>	<p>As part of the budget process we have reviewed staffing allocations, this is why the budget has changed. This does not mean we will deliver less in terms of what we provide, but we review staff allocations in order to be as accurate as possible in terms of reflecting the cost of the service.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>
<p>In the budget booklet, Page 6, point 11 - £6,500 was in in last year's budget for premises for Pest and Dog Control. This year it is only £20?</p> <p>(Cllr Mick Scrimshaw)</p>	<p>This relates to the renovation of a pest control store, which was one off expenditure.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>
<p>The government's Housing White Paper has been published today, have you had a look specifically at any changes we can make to continue with what we started in terms of increasing our own housing stock, or is it too early to comment?</p> <p>(Cllr Mike Tebbutt)</p>	<p>There are some encouraging noises in the document, but it would be wrong for me to comment at this stage as the document has only been published today and there is much detail to work through.</p> <p>Officer Comment</p>

16.MA.30 BURIAL POLICY (A2)

The committee received a report which sought to inform member in regard to KBC's Burial Policy for residents and non-residents and requested views of the committee on changing the policy following referral by full council at its meeting in December

The meeting noted that there was no statutory requirement for KBC to provide burial space for non-residents of the borough, however provision was made, utilising a multiplier for non-resident burial fees at four times that of the current resident rate. It was heard that neighbouring authority multiplier rates ranged from double the resident rate to five times the rate. Members were advised that KBC was managing a finite resource that had to be protected for local residents.

The committee was advised that the council allowed for non-residents with significant ties to the district to be buried at resident rates in exceptional circumstances. The cases were assessed on an individual basis, with 11 non-residents qualifying to be buried at resident rates since 2015. The meeting heard that individuals were able to obtain residents rates for burial in their own area of residence. In addition, exclusive rights of burial already purchased from KBC could be handed back to the council with a percentage of the fee returned.

Cllr Anne Lee attended the meeting and addressed the committee, explaining why she had brought her motion to Council and reaffirming her desire to have the multiplier for non-resident burial fees reduced to double that of a resident as opposed to the current rate of four times. She stated that there could be alternative methods employed to prevent the possibility of investment companies purchasing plots.

The committee heard that although the service was currently making a surplus of funding, this excluded capital investments made to improve the service, such as extending Rothwell Road cemetery and high-quality maintenance of other existing sites around the borough. It was further noted that Kettering currently had approximately 40 years of burial space available, should non-residents be allowed to purchase plots at the same rate as residents, this could reduce the available supply by approximately five years. Burial space in the A6 towns was estimate to last between 20 and 25 years, although works were ongoing to see whether there was available council-owned land to extend this.

Discussion was held regarding the practice of investment companies purchasing exclusive rights of burial plots for resale. It was considered that this was not common practice in the district, and no cases had been positively identified, although it had been an issue elsewhere in the country. The committee noted that the purchaser of an exclusive right of burial could in theory nominate whoever they wished to occupy the plot. Members requested that this issue be reviewed.

It was

RESOLVED

- i) That the differential of the non-resident burial fees remain in place, in line with the current policy; and
- ii) That a review of the policy of nominating plots to other people take place.

16.MA.31 PEST CONTROL – WASP TREATMENT SERVICE (A3)

A report was submitted which sought to provide members with an update on the council's current wasp treatment service.

The meeting noted that the council provided a comprehensive pest control service delivered by professionally trained and qualified staff. The service was not a statutory one and offered two price points for domestic premises, a £25 concessionary rate and full rate of £50. Fees charged covered the costs of various aspects of the service and were at the low end of the pest control market in comparison to the commercial sector.

It was heard that prior to booking any pest control job in relation to wasps comprehensive discussion was held with customers to ensure that the pests in question were definitely wasps and not bees, as the council did not consider bees to be pests and therefore could not treat them. The discussion could include customer provision of photographic evidence and direction to wasp identification information on the council's website. Customers were also advised prior to booking that fees were non-refundable even if treatment was not required as a result of the pest control visit. The meeting noted that officers retained discretion to waive fees if a customer was considered to be vulnerable and unable to make the distinction between bees and wasps. Approximately 50 cases a year were misidentifications of bees which had a financial impact on the authority in lost appointment time, lost officer time and travel costs.

It was

RESOLVED That the report on the wasp treatment service and the associated charges be noted.

16.MA.32 LOCAL POLLINATOR STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP – FINAL REPORT (A4)

A report was received by the committee which requested the approval of the final report and recommendations of the Local Pollinator Strategy Task and Finish Group.

The group had been established by the committee following a successful motion at Council in December 2014 and sought to examine and improve the plight of pollinating insects in the district.

The task and finish group had met several times, inviting a number of partnership organisations along to provide evidence and to assist in shaping the draft strategy. The draft document outlined the existing work of the council and detailed works that could be

undertaken to maintain council-owned land and influence developers within the borough.

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Cllr Jim Hakewill, gave his thanks to the officers who had been involved in the work of the group and stated that the subject was one that had caught the imagination. He noted a desire among members of the group that the final strategy be sent by the Executive Committee to Full Council for approval. This was one of several recommendations made by the group at its final meeting on 31st January as set out below:-

1. The group would welcome the introduction of an online toolkit that addresses the selection of correct pollinator friendly species from window box to major developments and details additional methods of assisting pollinating insects. In addition, the toolkit to allow for feedback to be supplied from individuals and groups in relation to their pollinating successes.
2. The group would like to see the strategy as an item of report to Full Council.
3. The group would request that the strategy be reviewed annually through the appropriate scrutiny committee as per the action to review that forms part of the strategy itself.
4. The group recommend that this strategy be embedded, wherever possible, within the planning system at KBC.
5. The group request that the Executive consider a small budget to pay for cards themed on KBC's pollinator strategy with attached seeds for the public to pick up for free in council buildings

The meeting heard that a small number of minor amendments were required to the draft Local Pollinator Strategy document, with an implementation date and document reference number required if approved by the Executive Committee at its March meeting.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Research and Development Committee had considered and recommended approval of the Local Pollinator Strategy Task and Finish group final strategy and associated recommendations to the Executive Committee.

16.MA.33 WORK PROGRAMME (A5)

The work programme was submitted to the Committee for

consideration. The following reports would be brought to the next Committee:-

- Viability of a New Swimming Pool
- Fly-tipping Strategy Update

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 8.50pm)

Signed:

(Chair)

DJP