

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

KETTERING TOWN FORUM

Meeting held: 28th January 2019

Present: Kettering Borough Councillors

Councillor Lloyd Bunday (Chair)

Councillor Linda Adams
Councillor James Burton (Mayor)
Councillor Ash Davies
Councillor Maggie Don
Councillor Scott Edwards
Councillor Anne Lee
Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor Clark Mitchell
Councillor Mick Scrimshaw
Councillor Shirley Stanton
Councillor Lesley Thurland
Councillor Greg Titcombe
Councillor Jonathan West

Representatives of Member Organisations

Stephen Mold (Police and Crime Commissioner)
Insp Scott Little (Northamptonshire Police)
Sgt Sean Marshall (Northamptonshire Police)
Simon Cox (Kettering Business Network)
Andy Sipple (Kettering Interfaith Forum)
Paul Ansell (Kettering Civic Society)
Philip Evans (Kettering Civic Society)

Also Present

Lisa Hyde (Kettering Borough Council)
Shirley Plenderleith (Kettering Borough Council)
Jo Haines (Kettering Borough Council)
Dean Mitchell (Kettering Borough Council)
David Pope (Forum Administrator)

18.KTF.24 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Jenny Henson, Phillip Hollobone, Margaret Talbot and the Deputy Mayor, Keli Watts. Apologies for absence were also received from County Councillors Eileen Hales, Bill Parker and Victoria Perry. Apologies were further received from Jane Calcott of Churches Together.

18.KTF.25 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Kettering Town Forum held on 1st October 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

18.KTF.26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor, Cllr James Burton declared an interest in Item 8 – Town Centre Delivery Plan as a Kettering market trader.

18.KTF.27 ROYAL VISIT

The Mayor announced that HRH Prince Charles had visited the Gaziano & Girling shoe factory in Kettering that afternoon.

18.KTF.28 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2019/2020 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Group Accountant Jo Haines attended the meeting and gave an overview on the budget proposals for the next financial year as well as the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Members of the forum heard the Executive Committee had started the formal consultation period for the Council's budget on the 16th January, and that the public budget consultation had been held on 24th January. Members noted that the views of all three Geographic Forums would be sought during the consultation period which would conclude on 27th February when the budget would be formally considered by Full Council and Council Tax levels set.

Members of the forum were informed that that during the financial year 2018/19, the Council's Budget Delivery Framework had helped to deliver £1.473 million in savings. The forum heard that central government's core grant to the council for the financial year 2019/20 was indicated to reduce by £115,000. This was £250,000 better than the figure previously modelled in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as a result of negative RSG being removed from the settlement.

It was reported that efficiency savings of £1.562 million had been identified for 2018/19 using the Council's Budget Delivery Framework. Members heard that the majority of these savings would be achieved through income from commercial investments, Business Rates income from increased growth, Treasury Management Income, joint working as part of the shared Street Scene Service with Corby BC, additional

government Homelessness Grant and additional income from New Homes Bonus.

It was reported to the forum that over the previous eight years council tax had been frozen. However, there was no longer any incentive provided by the government for local councils for freezing council tax rates and officer advice was to increase Council Tax to the threshold level of 3% for 2019/2020.

On average, just over £1m of ongoing efficiency savings would be required each year to 2023/2024 on top of the existing £12.8m savings made to date since 2010. The Government was consulting on a Fair Funding Formula for local authorities and the implications of this could have a significant impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. In addition, changes to the Business Rates retention scheme from 2020 posed a real risk to the Council. The retention rate would increase from 50% to 75% but the critical factor would be the point from which growth was measured. This was likely to be based on 2018/19 resulting in growth from previous years being lost.

HRA fund and capital programme details were also supplied, with the meeting noting that the capital programme of £29.3m represented a significant commitment.

Members of the forum asked the following questions in relation to the draft budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy:

Item / Issue	Summary of Response Given
<p>In relation to DS8 (Economic Development expenditure) the budgetary outturn for 2018/19 was £243,000 and the draft for 2019/20 is up to £303,000. I presume that the underspend on this year's budget was due to staff shortages? What wasn't delivered in that area that is hoped to be delivered in the 2019/20 budget and how may this affect support for the town centre retail sector?</p> <p>(Councillor Mick Scrimshaw, KBC)</p>	<p>That team had been two members of staff down, with one post recruited to. A new Economic Development Officer is due to start their role in the next couple of weeks, so a proportion of that underspend related to staff vacancies in that period. The Economic Development and Regeneration Manager was a new post. An update on the town centre will be provided as part of Agenda Item 8.</p> <p>(Lisa Hyde – Executive Director)</p>
<p>Northamptonshire has been successful in its application to be part of a pool for 75% Business Rates retention that would see £17m of additional funding brought in across the county. Do we have any idea of KBC's share and is it correct to assume any extra money is not accounted for in this budget?</p> <p>(Councillor Mick Scrimshaw, KBC)</p>	<p>None of that has been accounted for in this budget. Future governance arrangements in the county will decide what the extra funding is to be spent on.</p> <p>(Jo Haines, Group Accountant)</p>

<p>It is a surprise that the budget for Crime Reduction was unchanged for the forthcoming year given the issues raised in relation to crime at last meeting of the forum. Where are KBC wardens accounted for here, do we budget for more wardens or additional warden time given the stretched nature of that team?</p> <p>(Councillor Anne Lee, KBC)</p>	<p>Wardens were accounted for within Staffing within Public Health.</p> <p>(Lisa Hyde – Executive Director)</p> <p>The warden team capacity had recently been increased with a successful recruitment to a warden position. This would return overall capacity for the team to 8 wardens and 1.5 team leaders.</p> <p>(Shirley Plenderleith – Head of Public Services)</p>
<p>The Council had budgeted for a government grant reduction of £365,000. It was very prudent in doing that as we now had a have surplus of £250,000.</p> <p>(The Mayor – Councillor James Burton, KBC)</p>	

18.KTF.28 POLICE ISSUES AND STATISTICS

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Stephen Mold was welcomed to the meeting alongside police representatives.

The statistics provided were taken as read and members were invited to ask questions of the PCC and police representatives.

Questions were asked in relation to the following topics:-

- Criminals utilising sophisticated technology to remotely access vehicles without requiring keys
- The best method of emailing police - (NeighbourhoodTeamKetteringTown@northants.pnn.police.uk)
- Crime statistics for William Knibb ward had been missing from the police for some time
- A possible incident of carjacking in Kettering
- Drug offences increasing across all wards and County Lines activity
- An offer from Westhill Park Academy for police and PCSOs to use the site as a hub
- The lack of police publicity around a recent stabbing incident on Bath Road
- Low crime resolution rates
- Contingency plans for a potential spike in hate crimes relating to Brexit

- Whether police could gain extra financial resources from the government in the event of civil unrest arising from Brexit
- Whether the work of police was hampered by a lack of support services, especially in relation to mental health

The PCC outlined the budget setting process for the force that would be presented to the Police and Crime Panel the following week. He noted that there would be some form of rise in precept, but the extra income generated would see additional investment in neighbourhood policing, improved responses to burglaries and greater emphasis on drug offences, ASB and tackling crime in rural areas. A public consultation had been undertaken in relation to the budget and the details of the budget would be publically available.

Going forward, police aimed to make crime easier to report, with improved online reporting and the ability to upload photos and video footage. The force had a good track record of partnership working, especially with KBC and the move to a new form of governance in the county was seen as an opportunity to establish the best method of delivering services going forward.

18.KTF.29 PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

A brief presentation was provided to the meeting outlining the context and current status of Local Government Reform in the county and the potential timeline going forward.

Background to the proposal for alternative governance arrangements to form two unitary authorities in the county was provided, with the meeting noting that this had been submitted to the Secretary of State (SoS) in August 2018.

It was noted that should the SoS move forward with the submission, the services provided by the four districts in North Northamptonshire would be amalgamated, with county council functions for the area disaggregated and subsumed into the new body.

The government had made clear that following any submission there would either be no action taken, or a formal strategic consultation process would be undertaken on the proposal submitted. The latter option was taken forward, with the consultation commencing on 29th November 2018 and due to close on 25th January 2019. The options available to the SoS once the consultation concluded were:

- To implement the proposal as submitted
- To implement the proposal with modifications
- Not to proceed with the proposal

Key Dates that formed a possible timeline were provided. Discussions with civil servants had indicated that a final decision could be made by

SoS before the Parliamentary Easter recess on 4th April. Once the decision had been made, the government would need to go through the parliamentary approval process resulting in a Structural Change Order (SCO). Again, indications were that this may happen prior to the summer recess in mid-July 2019.

The SCO would legally disband the current local authorities from a specific date, legally set out interim governance arrangements and legally create the new unitary authorities. All final decisions regarding the SCO would be made by the SoS. Senior government officials had requested that each local authority provide preferences on issues attached to the SCO.

Once the SCO had been approved, there was a duty to hold a meeting of the shadow Council within 14 days of approval and a meeting of the shadow Executive within 21 days. In addition, a great deal of detailed work would be undertaken in the in background in terms of the creation of the new authorities to allow for safe and legal services to be delivered from day one, potentially 1st April 2020.

The budget process for the new authorities would be undertaken roughly between December 2019 and March 2020, with budgetary decisions and Council Tax setting to be made by the shadow authority, with a full membership of over 160 elected members.

The meeting heard that should 1st April 2020 be the chosen date for the commencement of the new unitary authorities, the existing authorities in the county would cease to exist from 31st March 2020. Shadow arrangements would continue until new elections were held in May 2020 that would provide elected members for the new unitaries.

Members raised concerns about the timeframe involved in the creation of a new shadow authority and the financial issues that may affect any new unitary authorities as a result of the position at the county council.

It was acknowledged that there was a need to work with the wider community and local organisations to keep people informed of developments of local government reorganisation as and when they happened.

In response to a question, it was heard that KBC staff were receiving regular updates and briefing regarding the reorganisation and retained a strong commitment to providing the best possible service to customers.

18.KTF.30 CASUAL VACANCIES ON THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

It was heard that as part of the Northamptonshire (Changes to Years of Elections) order 2018 clarification was being sought from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as to the impact

of the order on casual vacancies in the final six months of a Council's administrative term.

Clarity was sought in relation to three points as follows:

- Is the six month period curtailed as of 14th January to come into force again in November 2019?
- Does the six month period become an eighteen month period following the implementation of the Order?
- What happens to those seats on Town and Parish Councils that became vacant between November 2018 and 14th January 2019?

The MHCLG had committed to providing an answer at the earliest opportunity and this information would be forwarded to all relevant authorities.

18.KTF.31 TOWN CENTRE DELIVERY PLAN

An update was supplied to the meeting of the progress of the Town Centre Delivery Plan 2018-2025. The meeting noted that copies of the plan were available on the Council's website.

It was heard that during 2017/18 the Council had come to the end of the Suite 16 programme for the town centre and since that point there had been significant changes to shopping habits and patterns altering the faces of High Streets across the country.

A Town Centre Conference had been held in September 2017 to engage stakeholders and take forward their views as part of a draft Town Centre Delivery Plan. This plan had been submitted to the Executive Committee in May 2018 for approval.

It was noted that since that point there had been considerable change to the town centre with a number of big national stores vacating, although the town's food offer and night time economy was holding up well.

It was acknowledged that there was a need for partnership working to successfully take the town centre forward, with engagement from local businesses, community sector and other agencies required. Clarity on KBC's role was provided, with the meeting noting that KBC did not own town centre retail units and did not set Business Rates levels and there was a need to be realistic in terms of timings, costs and responsibilities associated with the delivery plan.

It was considered that the town centre needed to be repurposed to provide an offer that included a community hub or civic heart as well as incorporating areas for health and wellbeing, housing, education, arts, entertainment and culture in addition to retail. Kettering already had a good niche offer and it was hope to promote this further.

Town centre areas of progress were detailed as follows:

- KBC-owned Sheerness House was close to being tenanted for two of its floors, with Public Services staff due to occupy the bottom two floors as a result of their move from the current London Road site.
- Traffic remodelling on Eskdail Street had made a significant difference to town centre traffic flow
- There was a plan to look at commercial feasibility of the Gallery, Library and Museum alongside Friends of the Gallery.
- KBC owned the majority of the former police station and Magistrates' Court site on London Road and had plans for potential development of the site that were currently being worked
- KBC also had possession of the former County Court building on Dryland Street and work could be undertaken to help make The Yards more accessible
- The recently approved Seats on Streets Order would make it easier for eating places in the town to put seats on the pavements without having to complete significant levels of paperwork.

Ongoing action included monthly Clean and Refresh meetings, the Purple Flag renewal process and supporting Kettering markets.

The meeting heard that as part of the latest government budget process, a Future High Street Fund had been announced that sought bids for the following themes as part of a single transformative submission from each interested authority:

- Investment in physical infrastructure
- Acquisition and assembly of land to support new housing, workspace and public realm
- Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in that area
- Supporting change of use including housing delivery and densification
- Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology

The Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government sought expressions of interest by 22nd March, with an announcement of bids to be taken forward during the summer. Bids needed to be based on an existing plan, with elements of the Town Centre Delivery Plan being worked up to form part of a KBC submission as well as having support from external organisations such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, the private sector, community groups and retailers. Bids required co-funding as a mix of public and private sectors.

The first round of final businesses cases would be expected towards the end of 2019, with final businesses cases submitted in spring 2020. Up to £25 million was available for successful bid, although

average bids were expected to range between £5 million and £10 million.

The meeting asked questions in relation to the Future High Street Fund, London Road development, High Street paving and raised concerns regarding some of the unintended consequences of the Eskdaill Street traffic remodelling works. It was noted that a review of the new traffic system would be undertaken by Highways at some point to assess the new scheme and to ascertain whether traffic light sequencing or other amendments were required.

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

Signed.....

Chair

DJP