

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

MONITORING AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Meeting held: 29th October 2019

Present: Councillor Anne Lee (Chair)

Councillors Ash Davies, Jenny Henson, Paul Marks, Mick Scrimshaw, Mike Tebbutt, and Greg Titcombe

Also Present: Lisa Hyde (Executive Director)
John Conway (Head of Housing)
Guy Holloway (Head of Corporate Development)
Graham Thomas (Environmental Services Manager)
Beth Gordon (Operations Manager – Street Scene)
Hazel Webb (Community Services Manager)
Rob Thompson (Benefits Manager)
David Pope (Committee Administrator)

19.MA.28 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Chair, Cllr Jonathan West. Members offered their congratulations to Cllr West and his wife on the recent birth of their second child.

19.MA.29 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Monitoring and Audit Committee held on 26th September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19.MA.30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

19.MA.31 AIR QUALITY AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING (A1)

A report was submitted which provided an overview of the air quality issues in Kettering Borough Council's administrative area and an update on the progress with electric vehicle (EV) charging points.

The meeting noted that it was a Council requirement to review and assess air quality. KBC undertook the requirement through use of diffusion tubes at 17 locations around the Borough, with data from these reviewed and an annual status report provided to DEFRA. Currently DEFRA was evaluating the most recent readings and ongoing monitoring was taking place.

It was heard that there were two areas of concern in Kettering with regard to nitrogen dioxide levels in the Borough, one at Bridge Street and the other at the junction of St Mary's Road and London Road, although both sites had seen reduction in levels over the past year. Further work was being undertaken to model potential further reductions through traffic management options at the junction.

In relation to EV charging points, the Council had secured funding from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) to install EV charging points at a number of Council car parks at London Road, Commercial Road, School Lane and at a later date Churchill Way in Burton Latimer. The funding would provide 75% of the cost with the other 25% being provided through Section 106 monies. A tender exercise had been completed and the process was in its final stages with a view to installing EV charging points by the end of the financial year.

Jamie Wildman addressed the committee and stated that he considered there to be an insufficient number of diffusion tubes in place and that key junctions were not being monitored, especially in the light of the East Kettering development and the associated increase in traffic. He further stated that the Council should aspire to do more than the statutory minimum and to ensure raw data was available to the public. Mr Wildman also suggested that there was a lack of engagement with the public and stakeholders in relation to this issue. He called for the establishment of a working group to assist in combating environmental issues.

Members discussed the issue at length and considered that they had not had long enough to read and consider the level of detail provided in the report and considered that deferment of the item until the next meeting be approved.

In relation to a question regarding the location and number of EV charging points it was heard that once installed the number of points would be comparable to other surrounding authorities, with two units in each car park expected to meet current demand. This was an area the Council wished to build on going forward in addition to examining the possibility of on-street parking units. It was noted that the proposed location of units within Council car parks was based on the availability to nearby residents and making best use of funds available.

Further questions were asked in relation to:-

- Installation of electric bicycle charging points
- The impact traffic light failure at the St Mary's/London Road junction on air pollution readings
- The progress in negotiations with NCC regarding traffic flows at the above junction
- DEFRA data review information
- EV charging points at other locations outside Kettering
- Fees charged to motorists for the use of EV charging points

Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The air quality issue be deferred to the next meeting of the Monitoring and Audit Committee; and
- ii) Noted the work undertaken to implement electric vehicle charging points within a number of public car parks.

19.MA.32 REGENT STREET BEDDING FACTORY FIRE – DEBRIEF REPORT (A2)

A report was submitted which provided members with a summary of successes and learning points arising from the Council's involvement in the Regent Street bedding factory fire.

Members heard that the large fire at the factory had required a significant level of emergency service and Council resource at the time of the incident and during the recovery period. KBC had utilised an Incident Liaison Officer to provide a link between the Senior Management Team, the Housing department and Beth Gordon, the Emergency Planner.

Following the fire, a total of 22 households required housing that evening and temporary accommodation had been sourced for all. The following day the Fire Service had handed over the scene to KBC to commence the recovery phase which involved a significant number of KBC departments.

A Recovery Group had been instigated, meeting daily at first in an attempt to minimise the impact on the local community and to support displaced families. Liaison took place with affected residents and services such as the Post Office, utilities, insurers and security.

An internal debrief had noted the success of joint working across the Council, with departments working well to pool resources and support residents. Other areas for positivity included the rapidity of response, temporary accommodation arrangements and provisions of a single point of contact.

Members commended all those KBC officers involved in the incident for their professionalism and hard work under extremely difficult circumstances.

Questions were asked in relation to feedback from residents as to the Council response to the fire and the Local Resilience Forum.

RESOLVED that members noted the contents of the report.

19.MA.33 **KEY UPDATES – MONITORING OF SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT GRANTS 2019/20 – Q2 UPDATE (A3i)**

Members received a report outlining returns on Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreement Key Performance Indicators for Quarters One and Two, noting that the majority of providers were set to meet their targets this year.

Key highlights were provided in relation to Youthworks, Community Watch, Debt and Money Advice, Housing Options, Shopmobility and Upcycling.

Members asked questions in relation to the calculation of target figures and figures for the number of Community Watch schemes in operation.

It was heard that Kettering Futures Partnership would be holding its annual Partnership Day in November and it was anticipated that the organisation would be launching its public website.

19.MA.34 **KEY UPDATES – WELFARE REFORM (A3ii)**

Members received the regular Welfare Reform update.

In relation to Universal Credit, there had been little change in terms of rollout over the previous six months with a stable caseload. A managed migration pilot in Harrogate was progressing slowly with heavy criticism reported that the area did not suitably reflect the average customer on long term state benefits. Managed migration in Kettering appeared unlikely in 2020. Homeless claims, supported accommodation costs and Severe Disability Premium continued to be paid through housing benefit.

Mixed age couple rules introduced in May 2019 had had a relatively limited impact with only three cases identified locally, although it was anticipated this may have a greater impact going forward as these rules conflicted with the current Council Tax Support scheme.

In relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), 371 applications had been received to date, a similar level to the previous year with £100,000 spent or committed from a budget of £150,000. The DHP award from government for 2020/21 would not be known until early 2020. Work continued with customers alongside the Social Inclusion Team.

19.MA.35 KEY UPDATES – HOMELESSNESS/VOIDS (A3iii)

Members received an update on homelessness and voids, noting that approaches continued at a high level with an average of 34 a week in summer. This figure had now fallen to approximately 25 a week, which was a figure in line with that witnessed earlier in the year.

The use of Temporary Accommodation (TA) had reached a peak of 234 households in the summer although this had fallen to a current figure of 186. The Council's Temporary Accommodation Strategy approved in 2018 had resulted in fewer households in nightly paid accommodation, with more use made of Council housing stock and properties acquired on the open market. The rate of spend on TA had fallen significantly and there was an aim to come in around budget by the end of the financial year with a further reduction in numbers of households to 160 planned.

In relation to void properties, numbers had decreased significantly since management arrangements were altered, from a peak of 106 properties to a current figure of 33, in line with an authority of KBC's size. This figure had shown a sustained position for several weeks.

Members were reminded of a Member Information Evening in relation to Homelessness on 4th November.

19.MA.36 KEY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION BOOKLET (A5)

Members received the Key Information Booklet and asked questions in relation to:-

- Affordable homes figures
- Omission of question log in future editions
- Overpaid benefits recovered and rent collection
- A £100,000 overspend in relation to the crematorium and car parking

19.MA.37 WORK PROGRAMME (A6)

The contents of the work programme were noted with the addition of an item in relation to:-

- Air Quality
- Affordable Homes
- Detailed information on overspends
- Training Services/Apprenticeships
- Communication with the Public

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 8.51pm)

Signed
Chair

DJP