

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

MONITORING AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Meeting held 4th February 2020

Present: Councillor Jonathan West (Chair)

Councillors Jenny Henson, Anne Lee, Cliff Moreton, Mike Tebbutt, and Greg Titcombe

Also Present: Cllr Ian Jelley (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Delivery & the Environment)
Lisa Hyde (Executive Director)
Mark Dickenson (Head of Resources)
John Conway (Head of Housing)
Guy Holloway (Head of Corporate Development)
Shirley Plenderleith (Head of Public Services)
Julie Trahern (Head of Customer Service & KTS)
Graham Thomas (Environmental Services Manager)
Jo Haines (Group Accountant)
Carly Hohn (Housing Solutions Manager)
Nicola Meakins (Quality & Commercial Manager - KTS)
Dorothy Burrows (Business Manager - KTS)
David Pope (Committee Administrator)

19.MA.38 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Ash Davies. It was noted that Cllr Cliff Moreton was acting as substitute for Cllr Davies.

19.MA.39 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Monitoring and Audit Committee held on 29th October 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19.MA.40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Anne Lee declared a personal interest in Item A5 as a trustee for Groundworks.

19.MA.41 PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Two members of the public registered their intention to speak in relation to item A2. The Chair gave dispensation to one member of the public to speak for five minutes.

19.MA.42 ANY ITEMS OF URGENCY THE CHAIR DECIDES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

Cllr Lee raised an issue regarding the proposed residents parking scheme for the Headlands and Garfield Street. Residents had requested an update on the timeline for the introduction of this scheme following its consideration at the Sep/Oct meeting of the Executive Committee.

19.MA.43 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21 AND PREPARING FOR THE MEDIUM TERM (A1)

Members received the budget proposals with the Head of Resources and Group Accountant attending the meeting to answer member's questions and to provide a supplementary presentation that detailed:-

- The budget consultation timetable
- The composition of the General Fund (£60.7m), HRA (£15.4m) and Capital Programme (£39.2m) budgets that totalled £115.3m
- Main service pressures and risks (recycling, homelessness, local government grant funding)
- Four key funding streams and forecast changes to these (Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Retention, Council Tax and New Homes Bonus)

Members of the Committee submitted comments as follows:-

Item / Issue	Summary of Response Given
In relation to the proposed rent increase of 2.7%, has any assessment taken place as to whether an increase may cause financial difficulties for our tenants? (Cllr Cliff Moreton)	<i>The Tenants' Forum represents Council tenants and the proposed 2.7% increase was discussed at the November meeting of the forum. The representatives of the forum were receptive to the 2.7% increase.</i> (Officer Response)
Our level of Council Tax support is one of the lowest in the country. For two years we have decided to keep Council Tax support at the same level, but there is no mention of it in this budget. (Cllr Anne Lee)	<i>Council Tax Support was reported to the Executive Committee in September. The Committee was asked whether it wished to proceed with a formal consultation exercise however it decided not to in favour of freezing Council Tax support at the current rate.</i> (Officer Response)

<p>There are a lot of vacant posts and given the costs of employing agency staff have we been actively recruiting to fill those posts?</p> <p>(Cllr Anne Lee)</p>	<p><i>There are certain services areas where we would look to use agency staff, for example the Refuse Service. We make a conscious choice to use agency staff at times; it may be difficult to recruit to certain posts or specific knowledge is needed at a certain point. Salaries across the organisation are being delivered within budget.</i></p> <p>(Officer Response)</p>
<p>Where is the budget for fighting climate change? Where are the figures for the amount spent last year and what is the figure for next year?</p> <p>(Cllr Anne Lee)</p>	<p><i>The figures for this are embedded in service area budgets across the organisation.</i></p> <p>(Officer Response)</p> <p><i>Through our Climate Change Champions there is an ongoing process of costings around climate change implications.</i></p> <p>(Portfolio Holder for Strategic Delivery & the Environment Response)</p>

19.MA.44 AIR QUALITY MONITORING AND EV CHARGING POINTS (A2)

A report was submitted which sought to provide an overview of the air quality issues in Kettering Borough Council's administrative area and to update the committee on the progress with electric vehicle charging points.

A member of the public addressed the committee and registered his concerns regarding the accuracy of published air quality data and stated that in his opinion the Council was failing in its civic duty to protect the public.

The Committee heard that the air quality monitoring process followed by the Council was heavily prescribed with detailed guidance provided by DEFRA. In addition to this, KBC was also examining what else could be done outside of the monitoring process to improve air quality in the borough. Conversation had been ongoing with the county council for the past nine months in respect of modelling traffic flows at specific road junctions in the borough to see whether alterations could have a beneficial impact on air quality. Although a definitive conclusion had yet to be drawn, work undertaken to date suggested a minimal impact on air quality from modelled alterations, although improvement for traffic flows would make these works worthwhile.

A review was underway by independent consultants to ascertain whether a sufficient number of diffusion tubes were in place around the borough and that current locations were appropriate. In addition, the Council and the consultants were reviewing whether it was possible to obtain better quality data regarding air quality in the borough.

It was acknowledged that the population of the borough was expanding, and it was also likely that car use would increase, and the Council wished to pre-empt this and sought to resolve any issues that may arise before it became a statutory requirement to do so.

Officers acknowledged that a mistake had been made in published air quality figures, however this had now been corrected with all results for the entire year reviewed to ensure that 2019 data was correct.

It was heard that KBC officers provided local knowledge as well as undertaking statutory duties collecting and managing air quality data for submission to DEFRA, with consultants employed for very detailed work where specialist advice was required.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Delivery & the Environment attended the meeting and stated that he would work directly with the Environmental Protection team going forward on this complex issue. Members had a duty to assist in any way they could on this matter and discussions had been held regarding routing of construction traffic in Rothwell, especially in relation to Bridge Street so air quality issues were not exacerbated.

Members were encouraged to submit any concerns regarding air quality at specific sites in the Borough to feed into the consultant review of diffusion tube locations.

Members received a brief update regarding the progress of electric vehicle charging point installation in Council car parks.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- i) Reviewed the information provided in the report and supported the approach being undertaken with regards to the ongoing monitoring of air quality.
- ii) Noted the work undertaken to implement electric vehicle charging points within several public car parks.

19.MA.45 COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC AND THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE (A3)

The Head of Corporate and Cultural Services provided a presentation that provided an overview of Council communications with the public and the Council website.

The meeting noted that the Council was a complex organisation offering a wide range of high demand services to a large customer base with equally complex requirements. The need to communicate effectively was

key in ensuring customers could access the services they required and allowed resident involvement in shaping the future of the borough.

Channels of communication were varied for both incoming and outbound communications, ranging from face to face and phone-calls through to printed information and social media with the context being dependent on customer requirements.

Linked to this was the accelerating growth in technology, with the meeting noting the hugely increased use in online activity. Statistics were provided to the meeting of website use with over 4.5 million Council website page views since October 2018.

Online payments, email contacts and use of web forms had soared, with a slight reduction in the numbers of face to face visits made by customers. However, the complexity of customer requirements and interactions had increased which had offset this reduction.

Members asked questions in regard to direct and obvious links from the Council's website to both the "This is Kettering" and "Public Sector Reform" websites.

Questions were also asked in regard to provisions of clearer messages to the public in relation to parking machines, as well removal of out of date public information and feedback from the public.

19.MA.46 KEY UPDATES – KETTERING TRAINING SERVICES & APPRENTICESHIPS (A4i)

Members received a report supplemented by a presentation that provided an update regarding apprenticeships both nationally and locally.

It was heard that prior to May 2017 apprenticeships had been grant funded. From that date the government had introduced a 0.5% tax bill on any employer with a total salary bill over £3 million, with KBC being one such employer. In addition, the government had set ambitious targets to drive an increase in apprenticeships with a goal of achieving three million new apprentice roles nationally between 2015 and 2020. It was heard that take up was currently 28% below this target as a result of the levy and employers having additional responsibilities in relation to the administration of apprenticeships.

The meeting noted that there was a picture evolving that showed high-level apprenticeship numbers increasing due to levy payers looking for development of their existing staff with an associated decrease in level 1 and 2 apprenticeships severely affecting the 16-18 year old sector. Further national changes were due in September 2020 with apprenticeship products moving from a framework to a standards model.

The meeting heard that KTS had been impacted by national changes due to a relatively low number of levy-paying businesses being located in the local area. Consequently, the team had worked with businesses outside the borough to ensure continuation of the service. It was noted that the service offered an excellent apprenticeship programme that added value to the businesses it was involved with.

Work was underway to develop KTS to be in a position to offer Level 5 apprenticeships which were in demand from businesses. Work was also underway to produce a quality and improvement plan that would help educate employers in relation to the service offer. In addition, engagement with small businesses was being examined.

The meeting was advised that a recent Ofsted inspection had shown significant improvements in the study programme and apprenticeships offered and should be viewed very positively.

Members asked questions in relation to KBC apprenticeships especially those in tradesperson roles.

RESOLVED that members noted the detail contained in the report

19.MA.47 KEY UPDATES – HOMELESSNESS/VOIDS (A4ii)

Members received a presentation that provided an update on the current position in relation to both homelessness and void council housing stock.

It was heard that following a summer peak of 33 per week, the number of approaches from homeless households had reduced during autumn. The current figure of 34 for January was not unusual for the time of year. The reduction in approaches during the autumn period had allowed the department to focus on service improvement.

A 36% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation (TA) had also been seen, with a peak figure of 234 households in TA in August 2019 compared with a current figure of 148. This reduction had been achieved by focussing on “move on” plans for those in TA, addressing blockages in homeless processes while also working on homelessness prevention. It was noted that the Council had also reduced reliance on expensive nightly paid accommodation by 70% since its peak, with no families currently in B&B accommodation and a limited number of households in TA outside the borough.

Details were provided of the Winter Night Shelter which was in its third year of operation having opened on 11th November. A total of 26 individuals had been referred to the shelter to date with an average of 6 or 7 rough sleepers using the shelter on a nightly basis compared with around 12-13 a night in the previous year.

Funding awarded to the Council by the Rough Sleeper Initiative Fund had been utilised to fund a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker and to provide two Housing First properties for rough sleepers. In addition, a Cold Weather Fund grant of £42,000 had been secured allowing the night shelter to open earlier in the year and remain open every night as well as funding an outreach worker and shared accommodation to allow night shelter users to move on from the facility once it closed at the end of March.

The Committee heard that a total of 14 rough sleepers had been helped into settled accommodation to date. This had had a visible impact on the town centre, with rough sleeper numbers falling from 17 in November 2019 to a current figure of one. A bid for continuation of funding outlined above was in progress.

Phase 2 of the team action plan was an aim to drive further service improvements by reducing the use of temporary accommodation and helping customers through the homeless process smoothly and quickly. Members noted a shift in focus towards more preventative work and there would be a review of website information to ensure it contained comprehensive and robust advice.

Members received a progress update in relation to the purchase and reopening of Wellington House.

In relation to Voids, it was heard that the number of void properties had fallen dramatically as a result of revised management processes. Currently there were 60 void properties, with 42 of these undergoing works and 12 ready for new tenants to move in. January had seen an unusually high figure of 37 properties made void compared with the normal average of 15 per month.

19.MA.48 KEY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION BOOKLET (A5)

The Key Performance Information Booklet was noted.

19.MA.49 WORK PROGRAMME (A6)

The contents of the work programme were noted with the addition of the following items to be brought to the next meeting of the Committee:-

- Climate Change
- Internal Audit Plan 2020-2021
- Draft Audit Plan
- Final Accounts 2019-2020

- Pooling of Capital Receipts
- Asset Update

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 9.12pm)

Signed
Chair

DJP