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MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4 DECEMBER 2018

Present:

Councillors:

Adeleke	Imarni (Vice-Chairman)
Armytage	Mahmood (Chairman)
Bassadone	Pringle
Conway	W Wyatt-Lowe
England	
PHearn	
Howard	

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Griffiths (Housing)
Councillor Harden (Community & Regulatory Services)

Officers:

James Deane	Corporate Director (Finance & Operations)
Fiona Williamson	Assistant Director (Housing)
Linda Roberts	Assistant Director (Performance, People & Innovation)
Natasha Beresford	Group Manager (Strategic Housing)
Layna Warden	Group Manager (Tenants & Leaseholders)
Alan Mortimer	Group Manager (Property & Place)
Matt Rawdon	Group Manager (People & Performance)
Lucy Tash	Accountant – Housing and Regeneration
Cassy O'Neil	Corporate Support Team Leader (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 **MINUTES**

Following a Joint meeting of the OSC's where a budget presentation was given, the Housing & Community OSC meeting began at 8.00pm

Cllr Imarni referred to the minutes of 10th October and advised that she cannot comment as she had previously raised with the officer that some of her comments had not been included, explaining that although the officer has provided a respond, the Councillor had not had opportunity to re-review.

Cllr Bassadone & Cllr Hearn expressed that the minutes should not be recorded any differently to other committees; they should not be verbatim nor should they be as

long as 22 pages and that Members should not be prescribing the content of minutes; they are intended as a summary account.

Cllr England commented that circulating the recording of the meeting would have been helpful.

Cllr Imarni raised a point of concern that the officer that took the minutes has been off ill and so did not produce these minutes, resulting in the committee waiting 2 months for the minutes; adding her suggestion that a contingency plan should be in place in such a scenario to maintain continuity.

The Chairman confirmed the meeting in question was an exception and confirmed that minutes would return to being a short summary of discussions.

The minutes of the meetings held on 10th October 2018 and 7th November 2018 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllrs Banks.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None

6 BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2019/20

L Roberts delivered her presentation for the People, Performance & Innovation Service, which she advised also includes Community Partnership, Neighbourhood Action, Old Town Hall, Community Safety and Children Services. **A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix A.**

Questions

Cllr Imarni queried re. Community Grants and asked; has the criteria changed in the last 12 months, stating that it has come to attention that religious groups are not permitted to apply; referring specifically to The Salvation Army not being able to provide a Christmas lunch to this year due to their grant application being refused.

M Rawdon confirmed that there has been no change to the criteria and welcomed a separate discussion outside of the meeting.

Cllr Harden added that the grants cannot fund religious organisations, however, it is possible to fund projects being run by religious groups for the benefit of the community.

Cllr Imarni reiterated that The Salvation Army were denied for that reason. Cllr Harden responded that it would not have been owing to the religious criteria advising that there would have been another criteria not met.

Cllr England referred to CSU and suggested the proposed savings appear to be quite small, he referred to the £10k saving and asked; is this a net saving after purchase of equipment?

L Roberts confirmed and advised that in the longer term it would generate further savings.

M Rawdon added that the investment in equipment will enable customers to access greater self-service routes which it is hoped will result in reduced queues and a cultural change in how people interact with us.

Cllr England suggested some people might be affected by the alignment of hours with office hours and asked; will there be consideration for one late night a week?

M Rawdon advised the decision is based on call profiling which demonstrates the level of calls received early morning and late at night are at a low percentage and often the CSU cannot answer queries as no one is in the back office to refer to for an answer.

Cllr Adeleke referred to the Old Town Hall food refreshment provision, observing that the Old Town is already littered with restaurants and asking; how will you complete?

M Rawdon advised the intention for the Old Town Hall is to be bar refreshments available when show are on, with a possibility of linking with restaurant meals also available around timings of the shows.

Cllr Adeleke then referred to Adventure Playgrounds and asked; will the insurance cost not mitigate the additional income that will be generated through private hire?

Cllr Harden advised there is no change in circumstances; we already hire the facilities for parties and already have public liability for this. This will be about a push to advertise the availability of the facilities for private hire.

Cllr England referred to the cost of hiring Adventure Playgrounds for a party and asked, how are we sure this is affordable and for tenants in the area?

M Rawdon advised benchmarking will be carried out against other providers, but confirmed that the intention is to provide a low cost model.

Cllr Griffiths confirmed that the income from private hire should generate income; it is not a subsidised service provision.

L Roberts, M Rawdon & Cllr Harden left the meeting at 8.45pm

F Williamson delivered her presentation, advising that Housing is split between Housing Revenue Account & General Fund. **A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix B.**

Questions

Cllr Adeleke referred to the number of new appointments and asked; are those new appointments not going to increase expenditure?

Cllr Williamson referred to the growth items and advised they are on a 'spend to save' basis; each role with either generate income, or increase the revenue we are able to receive. The only post that is an exception is the Project Development role, explaining that we will need this resource to deliver the programme so as not to rely on consultants.

Cllr Harden re-joined the meeting at 9pm

Cllr Imarni asked F Williamson to run through the role of the Universal Credit Officer.

F Williamson handed over to L Warden as the role will sit within her group area. L Warden advised that predominantly this will be a triage role; Housing have made arrangements with local job centre that they will refer new applicants over to us so we can make an assessment and highlight to applicants what they need to be doing, what they need to be paying. The role will also offer support to people where payments might not have been made or are late; to help them sustain their tenancy. L Warden added that initially the role will also provide some digital support; helping people make a Universal Credit claims.

Cllr Imarni thanked the officer and commended the work of the team.

Cllr Hearn asked; will this be a full time post?

L Warden confirmed it would be.

Cllr Bassadone asked; when will the post be advertised?

L Warden advised that will not be in a position to recruit until full budgets are approved in February, adding that she will be looking to see if there is a need to have some interim resource in place in the meantime.

Cllr Griffiths expressed the concerns she has in relation to the Private Housing Service; commenting that she understood an additional post would be included for that service?

F Williamson confirmed the post is not in the presentation as it has not yet gone to Budget Review Group for challenge so cannot be included at this time. She handed to NBEResford to provide more detail on the post.

N Beresford referred to regulation change to HMO (Homes of Multiple Occupancy) which she explained is the primary function currently causing concerns, highlighting that the changes will significantly increase the number of HMOs that will need to be licenced in the Borough. She explained that there is a 6 month grace period in place

for HMOs to make themselves known to us, after that period there is an expectation that we will have to carry out some enforcement work.

N Beresford confirmed that she will be requesting a post, which is to be grant funded and reiterated that it will need to be considered by Budget Review Group before it can be presented to scrutiny.

The Chairman commented regarding new builds; we seem to have a very ambitious plan, which will come with risks. He asked, are we fully prepared for this?

F Williamson advised the development team have been doing a lot of work to appoint architects etc to ensure we are able to deliver against the ambitious plans. Currently looking at 10 garage sites to be submitted simultaneously as a single application and confirmed they are looking at how to structure delivery to meet those ambitions and advised she is confident that the Council will be able to deliver against proposals submitted.

The Chairman referred to the proposals for people to be able to purchase land next to their properties and commented that this is a positive move.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

Next meeting 23 January.

8 JOINT BUDGET OS PRESENTATION - HOUSING 2019-20

The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm



Joint Overview & Scrutiny

Committee: Housing and Communities

Delivered by Fiona Williamson

4 December 2018



- Strategic Housing
- Tenants and Leaseholders
- Property & Place
- Housing Development



- General Fund
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Landlord Service



Divisional Overview 2019/2020

Description	2019/20 Budget	19/20 Growth requests	19/20 Savings/Efficiency proposal
Strategic Housing (GRF)	£1,464,960	£0	£212,000



Efficiency/Saving 1: Description/summary

Strategic Housing – Overall Saving/additional income of £212K

Additional revenue from the ongoing and increased use of Temporary Accommodation

Revenue from 12 new Temporary Accommodation units built on Westerdale and Northend garage sites

Additional revenue from the licencing and management of the Private Rented Sector



Initiative 1: Implications

Increased timescale for administration of Homeless applicants under the Homelessness Reduction Act Savings results in longer periods in Temporary Accommodation

The development of the two garage sites enables additional revenue from two underused garage sites

The impact of the changes in Houses in Multiple Occupation licencing has increased the number of properties requiring licensing and ongoing enforcement action to address any rogue landlords



Initiative 1: Risks

Delays in the build or occupation of the 12 new Temporary Accommodation units

Increasing demand for Temporary Accommodation and the resources to manage these licensees

Ability to identify Housing in Multiple Occupation where the landlord has failed to licence the premises.



Divisional Overview 2019/2020

Description	19/20 Growth requests	19/20 Savings/Efficiency proposal
Tenants & Leaseholders (HRA)	£75,000	£25,000
Property & Place (HRA)	£86,000	£145,000
Housing Development (HRA)	£24,000	£0



Housing Revenue Account 2019/20

Capital Budgets	
Investment works	£17,746,000
New Build	£21,442,000

Revenue Budget	
Cyclical and day to day repairs	£12,078,000



Growth 1: Description/summary/Rationale

Tenants and Leaseholders £75K cost

Universal Credit Officer – fixed term post for two years to support tenants who transfer to UC to ensure they continue to manage their rent accounts

Income Analytics – software tool to enable targeted intervention to collect rent and reduce the administrative time associated with reviewing multiple rent accounts.



Efficiency/Saving 1: Description/summary

Tenants and Leaseholders £25K

Universal Credit Officer – will deal specifically with tenants on UC to identify any that are struggling to manage their rent to reduce the volume and value of arrears

Income Analytics – the use of this tool reduced the administrative time taken to identify and process tenants in rent arrears and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the team



Initiative 1: Risks

Universal Credit officer may find difficulties in getting tenants to prioritise rent and will need to use encouragement and enforcement to maximise the rent collected

Income analytics may take longer to implement and therefore reduce the effectiveness in the first year

Both will be monitored and managed to ensure the maximum benefits can be derived.



Growth 2: Description/summary/Rationale

Property and Place £86K

Tenant and Leaseholder Alterations surveyor – this is a dedicated post to deal with the requests for tenants and leaseholder alterations and the proposal is to charge leaseholders for this service

Maintenance Officer – these roles transferred to Osborne and it has been identified that in order to deal with tenant enquiries for non-standard repairs or small works it would be beneficial to manage this role in-house.



Efficiency/Saving 2: Description/summary

Property and Place £145K

Minor capital receipts from the granting of easements, disposal of small areas of land

Additional revenue from lease extensions, disposal of freeholds, increased recharges and charging for leaseholder alterations inspections.

Reduction in expenditure on small works and repairs with the involvement of the dedicated maintenance officer to liaise with tenants



Initiative 2: Risks

Wider economic factors that reduce the interest in purchasing small areas of land or freeholds

Reduction in numbers of tenants and leaseholders undertaking alterations to their properties and the potential increased demand for repairs.

Increase in the number of unauthorised alterations by leaseholders



Growth 3: Description/summary/Rationale

Housing Development £24K

Development Project Manager – the team co-ordinator post will be replaced with a Project Manager, so that there is increased capacity within the team to deliver the additional new build programmes which will be delivered as a result of the lifting of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap.



Initiative 3: Risks

Inability to deliver the enhanced programme of social housing that has been planned or the need to rely on consultants to undertake the work.

Competition in the sector for skilled professionals has resulted in a skills shortage and may make this post difficult to recruit to



Any Questions



Joint Overview & Scrutiny

Division: People, Performance and Innovation

Housing and Communities OSC

Delivered by : Linda Roberts

4 December 2018



Divisional Overview 2019/2020

Description	2018/19 Budget	19/20 Growth requests	19/20 Savings/Efficiency proposal
People & Performance	£2,713,920	£20,000	£39,000
Service B			
Service C			
Service D			



Efficiency/Saving 1: Description/summary

The Old Town Hall - To award a food and beverage contract - additional income £7k

This would generate an additional income through rent and a reduction casual staff budget. The service is currently managing the bar in house with limited food offerings, and broadly breaking even.



Initiative 1: Implications

Savings Implications

- **An attractive contract** – We need to ensure the market is interested in the tender offer i.e. can they make it work for them and us financially.
- **Location** – By not having a first floor window and walk in area, could lead to less market interest.



Initiative 1: Risks

Risks

- **No Interest in Contract** – The food and beverage market do not perceive the contract as a viable business. Mitigation – engage with local small refreshment businesses and making the tender process as simple as possible.
- **Provider unable to sustain business** – Successful provider cannot make the contract viable. Mitigation – the Council will need to support the business in sharing previous experiences in running the service and initially providing a flexible approach in the financial return.



Efficiency/Saving 2: Description/summary

Adventure Playgrounds – additional income £7k

- To increase the number of private hirers at the APGs.
- This will involve re-branding the party offering and carrying out a robust marketing plan. Areas being explored are: themed parties (football, sports, laser tag), offering food options to parties, installing slush and ice cream machines, on-line booking / payment system.
- This will complement the operational change at the APGs of not being open for free play on Saturdays.



Initiative 2: Implications

Savings Implications

- **Infrastructure** – We need to ensure APGs have the right infrastructure to host a higher number of parties/hiring.
- **Marketing** – There will need to be a considerable effort given to marketing the APGs to increase awareness of the party/hirer offer. In the past there has been very little advertising.



Initiative 2: Risks

Risks

- **Number of bookings do not increase** – The part offer/hire is not attractive to our residents. Mitigation – To have a robust marketing plan which highlights the offer and keep hire costs as low as possible.
- **Increased H&S risk** – If numbers of visits are increased there is a higher risk of accidents. Mitigation – Risk assessments are updated, facility maintenance is regularly monitored, independent H&S audits.



Efficiency/Saving 3: Description/summary

Hemel Town Centre Large Screen – additional income £5k

- To secure an advertising contract for the large screen.
- This will involve letting (controlled) advertising time on the play list.



Initiative 3: Implications

Savings Implications

- **Infrastructure** – The screen has been enhanced recently to meet requirements for letting advertising space.



Initiative 3: Risks

Risks

- **Unable to secure advertising contract** – The advertising market do not perceive the offer to be good value. Mitigation – Initial discussion have taken place with potential provider.
- **Inappropriate advertising content** – Advertisers play content that is not acceptable to the Council and its residents. Mitigation – providers will need to comply with the Council's advertising guidelines. Any breach will be addressed by the contract manager.



Efficiency/Saving 4: Description/summary

Operational changes in the Customer Services – saving of £10k

- Introduction of a floor walker culture
- Opening times to reflect Forum office hours
- Cheque payments to be processed back office
- Explore the merits of web chat
- Trial appointments model for face to face queries – vulnerable customers to have immediate appointments
- Self service scanners at all locations
- Introduction of payment machines in Berkhamsted and Tring



Initiative 4: Implications

Savings Implications

- **Infrastructure** – The correct equipment will need to be introduced.
- **Staffing** – Staff will need to adapt their approach / behaviours to work with customers to encourage self service (where possible). Staff training will be required to fully utilise web chat and use the booking system.



Initiative 4: Risks

Risks

- **Self Service** – The take up is slower than expected. Mitigation – By having the right infrastructure in place and the correct approach by staff, some customers will save time in the future.
- **Vulnerable residents** – Vulnerable residents not being able to see a council officer immediately. Mitigation – there will be a triage officer to determine customer need so vulnerable residents will not have to book an appointment.



Efficiency/Saving 5: Description/summary

Community Grant Scheme

- Reduce the budget of £81,000 by £10,000.



Initiative 5: Risks

Risks

- **Less financial support for voluntary sector** – Less community projects being delivered in 2019/2020. Mitigation – To ensure that the community projects applying for 2019/20 meet the grant criteria, so they continue to add value to the community and support the Council's objectives.
- **Voluntary sector** – Negative PR from the voluntary sector. Mitigation – Promote the Council's overall support to the voluntary sector and protecting the community contracts budget.



Growth 1: Armed Forces Day

Proposal

- To host an Armed Forces Day

Investment Required

- £20k from reserves (this may be reduced if we are successful in MOD grant funding).

Rationale

- To continue delivering a successful and well attended event.
- To continue to show support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community: from serving troops to service families, veterans and cadets.
- To support the Council's aim of building strong and vibrant communities.



Any Questions