

MINUTES
JOINT BUDGET
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
7 FEBRUARY 2017

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Banks
Mrs Bassadone
Conway
England
P Hearn
Imarni (Vice-Chairman)
Mahmood (Chairman)
W Wyatt-Lowe

Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Officers:

Julie Still	Group Manager – Resident Services
Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director – Housing
Natasha Brathwaite	Group Manager, Strategic Housing
Andy Vincent	Group Manager (Tenants & Leaseholders)
James Deane	Corporate Director (Finance & Operations)
Fiona Williamson	Group Manager (Property & Place)
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

86 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on 28 January and 4 February 2016 were agreed by members

87 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Timmis and Cllr Silwal

88 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Imarni declared she was a trustee of Sportspace.

89 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were two public participants, Joan Whitehead and Ivan Gashev (Students, Trainee Journalists from Luton)

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

None.

91 **JOINT BUDGET REPORT 2017/18**

J Deane gave an in depth presentation on the 2017-2018 budget.

E Brooks then gave a break down on changes to the housing services plan. He highlighted a few key points, Appendix B-1 - page 9.

The growth item, homeless prevention, this is to tackle issues. This has now been approved and is in the budget.

B1 – Page 10, garage maintenance – garage rent will be increasing and fifty thousand pound will be spent on maintenance as previously discussed.

B&B spend is down.

Joint growth is for domestic abuse, and a new officer for a new role. Appendix G page 64, there is major movement in rent reductions and right to buy. Previously we sold 20 per year we are now selling around 100.

There has been an impact on electrical testing due to the recent changes, the budget was amended and will be reviewed at Council in Feb.

E Brooks was happy to take questions

Cllr England asked if the £500,000 for electrical testing will happen every year.

F Williamson said it is recommended now, once every 5 years. There will be a spike in the first years as we need to capture those that fall from the back end of the previous 10 years.

Cllr Bassadone asked if the garage money will include a re-paint.

F Williamson said yes, it will cover the costs for the timber components to be replaced with PVC ones and the garages will be powder coat painted.

Cllr Bassadone asked how it will be managed.

F Williamson said that there is a disposal programme outline. The worst areas will be done first.

Cllr Imarni referred to re-charges, this has been a topic before. Page 13, is this a U turn on the last strategy.

J Deane said there are strict rules with the re charge.

Cllr Imarni with regards to re charge on properties is that still happening and are we as strict.

E Brooks explained that the re charge she was referring to is not the same re charge as in the report, but the re charge officer will recover the money and change the culture. The officer was recruited in September 2016 so money is now starting to come in, the collection rate is still low, targets are set going forward.

Cllr Imarni asked if there was the right level of risk.

E Brooks said we aren't talking it blindly it's a reasonable re charge.

Cllr Mahmood asked if tenants were aware.

E Brooks confirmed that they were aware and have gone down many avenues to make them aware.

Cllr Mahmood referred to gas testing and asked how often does that it need to be tested.

F Williamson confirmed that it needs to be tested on an annual basis. Compliance is 100% and there are 5 properties that haven't been done, DBC are currently going through the legal process to get access.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe raised issues on recovering costs of major repairs from leaseholders (on deferred terms)
What services are there for them?

F Williamson said that they don't have an obligation they are given an opportunity with a rate, currently no one has taken this up.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe said that this is a risk to us.

E Brooks said that it's only as unsafe as a block of flats and that there is no legal requirement.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe said that leaseholders may be being unfairly treated, he had one example of a high cost roof and the leaseholder couldn't spread the cost, and asked if the cost could be extended.

F Williamson said that its interest free over a 6 year period, the costs is generally manageable over this period.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe stated that this is an area of concern.

E Brooks said that they could take this to the tenants and Leaseholders Committee for discussion. A commitment was given to have a report on how leaseholders are treated brought to H&C OSC in the future.

Cllr Mahmood asked why some premises went down in costs.

J Deane to find out why and report back.

Cllr Hearn and Cllr Bassadone left at 20:40

Cllr England said that the garage increase was 10% why does it now say 15%

E Brooks said we haven't increased the proposal.

A Vincent said there was a difference between standard and premium garages, this could account the difference.

Cllr England asked how long it will take for the repairs to be complete.

E Brooks said a few years at least, to be in a good standard.

Cllr England referred to the increase in the training organisation to use the adventure playground.

J Still said it's now in line with community centres.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe asked whether the adventure playgrounds were used by primary or secondary schools, as schools funding has changed'. Since the response was that usage was largely by primary schools - whose funding ratio has improved - there is no problem.

J Still said it's only Primary Schools that use the services once or twice a year.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe referred to election costs, do we pay for it then get it credited back?

J Deane said Herts County Council pays for it and Jim Doyles budget is further down.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe referred to the life line availability, if the power supply fails does BDC re credit people.

A Vincent said if a power supply goes down it has a backup for a few hours he is unaware of any recharges as it costs so little per day.

Cllr Harden referred to verge hardening, the news currently stated about inflation, won't this be affected.

J Still said that the budget is fixed for three years. If new areas arise then the priority programme is re-evaluated and the list does change. If there are any areas of concern please pass this information on to J Still, there are currently 120 areas on the list.

Cllr Griffith said that the amount is currently fixed. If we can get more pads for less they will but the price varies on area. If there is a case it will be put in but there is no control on the current fixed budget.

Action: None

Outcome: The report was noted.

N Brathwaite introduced the report highlighting that the report came out in October 2016 this is now approved, and additional added to the policy which is in the report. They aim to tackle rough sleeping and work with statutory and voluntary sectors as they have issues in the water gardens and the town centre. Support is always offered but not taken up.

N Brathwaite was happy to take questions.

Cllr Mahmood said if someone becomes homeless do we look at their background.

N Brathwaite said yes, investigations are undertaken.

Cllr Mahmood said is there no legislation in the Bill.

N Brathwaite this will be added, it's currently in the second sitting in Parliament. She will ensure it gets amended in the policy.

E Brooks said we will request and item on it when it becomes and act.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

93 WORK PROGRAMME

Remove resident involvement from March

Homelessness Bill add to the list.

Youth Connexions from Jan, add to March for info only.

The Meeting ended at 9.09 pm