

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Wednesday, 19 August 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Nunn (Chair); Councillor Larratt (Deputy Chair); Councillors Eldred, Hadland, Hallam, J Hill and Hibbert

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor King.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2020 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

None.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

6. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

None.

7. FINANCE MONITORING TO 30 JUNE 2020

Councillor Eldred, as the relevant Cabinet Member, submitted a report and reported a current forecasted overspend position of £1.434m; the update appendix detailed some of the areas most impacted by Covid-19. He explained that the Covid-19 government grants were held within a portfolio area under the Chief Finance Officer in order to facilitate accounting assistance with identifying cost pressures; where grants were recorded did not have a detrimental impact on those services. Virements, costs and budget setting would take place during the year once costs and needs were more stable. The forecast assumed a prudent view of government support announced in respect of lost income through fees and charges and the Council awaited further guidance in respect of the schemes, how they would work and what they would assist with. Councillor Eldred noted that draft guidance had been shared with officers and that he anticipated the forecast overspend position improving in the next report. However, as some costs and losses were unlikely to be covered in government grants it was likely that there would be a residual overspend pressure throughout year, which would be monitored. With regard to Business Support grants, Councillor Eldred reported that the scheme would run until the end of August and encouraged small businesses to apply if they had not already done so. He noted that approximately 3000 grants had been given out, totalling £35.55m. Councillor Eldred explained that the report also sought to increase the HRA borrowing limit by £50m; money would be borrowed as schemes came forward and each would be considered by the Cabinet. Properties would be acquired to either meet specific needs of residents, also alleviating the use of temporary accommodation. Properties purchased would also increase the Council's own housing stock. Councillor Eldred advised that based on the mix of schemes being looked at, it was expected that the funds would deliver between 300-400 homes, depending on the eventual mix of flats and houses.

Councillor Stone addressed the Committee and expressed concern around hidden costs around savings, specifically staffing, and questioned what the overall impact on the annual

budget would be.

Councillor Eldred explained that savings around staffing were unfilled vacancies and that all other savings were highlighted in the report. He advised of no further ongoing costs. In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Eldred urged any staff members to contact their line manager with any issues or concerns that they had, specifically relating to Covid-19 pressures.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet:

- 2.1 Noted the contents of the report and noted that future reports will set out the actions being taken by Corporate Management Board (CMB) to address issues arising.
- 2.2 Supported a request being made to Council in September 2020, to further increase the HRA Budget funded through borrowing by £50m.

8. HOUSING ACQUISITION OPTIONS

Councillor Hibbert, as the relevant Cabinet Member, submitted a report and reported a successful pilot scheme whereby 24 properties were purchased and let to homeless households that had spent the longest in temporary accommodation. The report proposed to extend this scheme, including any suitable homes (not only ex-council houses) and expand on the scheme to house rough sleepers through the government's "Move In" initiative. Councillor Hibbert explained that the scheme's progress would be closely monitored by a multi-disciplinary Group, following suggestions from the Overview & Scrutiny Working Group, and an additional recommendation, 2.1 (g), included.

Councillor Lane addressed Cabinet; he thanked Councillor Hibbert and the Director of Housing for the report. He welcomed the amendment and looked forward to seeing future reports.

Councillor Stone addressed Cabinet and expressed concern around the length of time people spent in temporary accommodation, the impact it had on family life and children and the impact that Covid-19 had on families living in high-density housing.

Councillor Hibbert stated that temporary accommodation was always the first resort with regard to rough sleepers and noted that the Council's own housing stock was increasing through the private purchase of properties.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet:

- (a) Noted the outcome of the housing acquisitions pilot and the lessons learned;
- (b) Approved the extension of this scheme to acquire more homes;
- (c) Approved the expansion of this scheme to include homes that will meet the needs of people who have been sleeping rough and are rehoused through the Government's rough sleeping move-on initiatives;
- (d) Approved the expansion of this scheme to include any suitable homes (not just those that were previously owned by the Council)

and noted that the acquisition of blocks of similar homes can reduce the maintenance cost risks;

- (e) Agreed that, although this scheme will continue to utilise a Target Operating Model which is based on agreed formulae and ceilings on purchase and repair costs, the acquisition of homes to meet specialist requirements may be approved by the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Northampton Partnership Homes, when those acquisitions are forecast to remain affordable within the Housing Revenue Account model;
- (f) Delegated to the Borough Secretary the powers (including, but not limited to, any variation required to be made to the Management Agreement between Northampton Borough Council and Northampton Partnership Homes dated 5 January 2015) that may be necessary in order to implement any Cabinet approvals arising from this report or past Cabinet reports in connection with the alleviation of the costs of temporary accommodation; and
- (g) Agreed that a multi-disciplinary group will oversee the implementation of the housing acquisitions scheme and will provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regular updates on the scheme.

The meeting concluded at 6:25 pm