

One Corby Policy Committee

Tuesday 18th June 2019

At 7:00 pm in the Council Chamber, The Cube, George Street, Corby

Present:- Councillor T Beattie (Chair), M Keane, W Latta, J Addison, E Elliston, P Beattie, D Sims, K Watt & A Dady.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eyles, McEwan, McGhee & Pengelly.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests they may have in the business to be discussed and/or indicate whether this was prejudicial or non-prejudicial, the nature of any interest, and whether they intended participating in the relevant agenda item.

Councillor K Watt declared a personal & non-prejudicial interest in relation to the report on rough sleeper funding and activities.

3. North Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership

The report before Committee, detailed structural and operational matters relating to the possible formation of a North Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership (NNCSP). It was being proposed to merge the existing Community Safety Partnerships covering Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire.

The four partnerships currently worked to their respective local priorities which aligned with a number of key county strategies including the Police and Crime Plan.

The report detailed the future operation of the proposed NNCSP. It was noted that participating in the NNCSP at this juncture would enable Corby BC to influence its direction and priorities ahead of the creation of a unitary authority (likely in April 2021). Streamlining of meetings should enable greater agency input, consistency and co-ordination of the north strategies and delivery plans to address the issues in each locality. This may bring added benefits for commissioning of services and strengthen funding bid applications.

Councillor Dady raised concern that the excellent work undertaken by Corby CSP may be diluted and local priorities lost. Councillor Dady praised the work undertaken by the local CSP and sought assurance that Corby's priorities would not be superseded and local resources diverted. Officers suggested that early involvement in the North Northamptonshire CSP would assist in ensuring that Corby priorities were protected and would shape future policy for the unified CSP.

The Chief Executive gave assurance that Member oversight would not be diluted and that Councillor Caine would be invited to attend the regular meetings he held with senior officers from Northamptonshire Police.

Councillor T Beattie recognised that ultimately the Local Government Reform programme would see the creation of a new unitary authority. It was important that Corby ensured its local priorities were protected and this would be more easily achieved by participating at the formation of the NNCSPP rather than later. Councillor T Beattie empathised with Councillor Dady's concerns and recognised that no guarantees could be given at this stage; however it was important that Corby were represented from the start.

Councillor Watt expressed concern that OCPC were being requested to consider this item 12 days before it was due to commence. Councillor Watt would have appreciated more time to discuss and consult on the issue.

Councillor Sims supported Corby's participation and that the opportunity be taken to engage at the start so the Borough's issues and priorities were not discounted.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The merger of the Corby CSP into the proposed NNCSPP with effect from 1st July 2019 be agreed.

4. Rough sleeper funding and activities

The report before Committee, sought to provide information on current rough sleeper issues within the Borough and to seek approval for the use of grant funding provided in relation to rough sleeping locally. The report also sought approval for the use of General Fund reserves to fund capital expenditure to create a night shelter within the Council's housing stock (Dorking Walk) to be managed by a third party.

In September 2017, the Committee had approved a Rough Sleeper Policy with the stated aim of ending rough sleeping within the Borough. The causes of rough sleeping were of course complex, and achieving the stated Policy aim was a clear challenge for the Council. Council Officers, primarily within the Housing Options and Neighbourhood Warden teams, had worked hard to engage with rough sleepers and support them into settled accommodation. Despite this, and in common with both the country and countywide experience, numbers of rough sleepers had continued to rise.

The headline figure for CBC of an increase of 600% (from 4 to 28) between 2017 and 2018 was concerning, but there was context to that increase. In 2017, Corby Nightlight was open on the night of the count, which meant their guests were not counted, as not technically "rough sleeping". Perversely, this low figure placed the Council in a worse position in bidding for funding as the Council were unable to evidence an issue. In 2018, Nightlight was not open, hence the increase.

The committee were pleased to note that the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was being reviewed and updated (this was being led by Corby BC in conjunction with the other three local authorities within the proposed North Northamptonshire unitary area) and would be submitted for committee approval in September 2019. In advance of this, the Council was leading on the creation of a Rough Sleeper Strategy Delivery Group (Corby BC, statutory agencies, CCG, NCC, volunteer groups, faith groups) to ensure partners were collaborating and coordinating their rough sleeper activities with a first meeting of the Group planned for late June 2019. As at 02 June 2019, it was believed there are around fifteen persons rough sleeping within the Borough.

The Government has announced a number of rough sleeper initiatives and made available funding for local authority bids. The Council has bid for funding from the Cold Weather Fund; Rough Sleeper Initiative Fund; and the Rapid Rehousing Pathway. This report will discuss the outcome of each in turn.

In relation to a recent Council bid to the Cold Weather Fund this had been successful. Following a period of severe weather, where CBC accommodated rough sleepers regardless of priority need, the Council could apply for a refund of up to £4,000 in respect of the expenses it had occurred.

The Council had also applied to the Rough Sleeper Initiative Fund (RSIF). This was a successful application based on the “Housing First” model with a total one-off award of £115,000. This model aimed to accommodate rough sleepers, with support following on from that, rather than attempt to resolve social issues whilst rough sleepers were “on the street”. There were two elements to the Council’s bid, tabulated below for Committee consideration:

	Description	Amount awarded
1	Professional support (e.g. consultancy) for the set up and running of a new 24/7 shelter in Corby to provide emergency first stop housing for rough sleepers. Emphasis on LGBTQ+, non-recourse to public funds, ex armed forces and other vulnerable groups	£50k
2	Operational delivery of the Housing First Model through outreach support and co-ordination of housing resources. a) 1x post Outreach Worker (to enable more rough sleeper engagement with the Council) – hosted by Housing Options b) 1x post Move-On Coordinator (housing support role facilitating moves into permanent accommodation) – hosted by 3 rd party 2x £30k for salaries; £5k for equipment/mileage.	£65k

The report before Members sought Committee approval for the addition of a temporary post to the establishment for twelve months (2a above). Due to the funding being a “one-off”, a temporary post was felt appropriate. The report also sought Committee approval for the appropriate amendments to budgets to reflect the funding award, and to proceed with invitations of “expressions of interest” in relation to point 1 and 2b above. The criteria used in the award of the funding would be aligned to the Council’s corporate aim of ending rough sleeping in the Borough and, depending on the Committee’s decision, may overlap with the expressions of interest sought in relation to the management of the night shelter proposed within the report.

Budget forecast based on above

	2019/20	2020/21
RSIF	£115,000	-
Expenditure	£90,000	£25,000

The Council submitted a bid to the Rapid Rehousing Pathway Fund for conversion costs for Dorking House, a former Safe Haven temporary accommodation property on the Kingswood estate that had become vacant.

It was a large unit, created through a previous conversion of separate dwellings (82, 98 & 100 Dorking Walk) into one large unit and a small flat, originally for a homeless hostel called Dorking House. This closed in 1995 and re-opened in 2002 as a “User Support Service”, which converted to the “Safe Haven Project” in 2006. This project provided a supportive environment for individuals over the age of 18 years (living or residing in Northamptonshire) who had short term or enduring mental health problems or who deemed themselves in crisis. There was room for short term overnight stays if necessary but this was not its main purpose. Since November 2016 the property had been vacant.

In terms of other properties within the Council’s housing stock, Dorking House was unique as it was already substantially converted into a suitable property. There were no other properties within the Council’s commercial property portfolio that were vacant and suitable for conversion. Cannock Road gymnasium was previously proposed as a night shelter and the property remained suitable for this, but conversion works were estimated at £600k when this was being looked at by Corby Nightlight; it was indicated in the report that the gym would be suitable for conversion into four dwellings and was being scoped for inclusion into the Council’s Housing Development Programme.

Dorking House could be remodelled into 3 self-contained units:

1. A 16 bed dormitory style night shelter that has 5 separate dorm rooms, an office and female/male bathing facilities;
2. A 3 room flat with 2 double rooms and 1 single room, shared kitchen and bathroom facilities and office space; and
3. A 2 room flat with 1 double room and 1 single room and shared kitchen and bathroom facilities.

There was also some external space, including 3 gardens and a balcony.

The plan was to have a flexible offer that would deal with immediate homelessness to resolve or prevent rough sleeping and had a medium solution of more independent housing where support could be put in place to deal with issues that prevent service users from sustaining their own tenancies.

Service users would be on the following pathway:

1. Night shelter – triage and assessment/support – the “First Stop”;
2. Shared flats – move-on, supported shared accommodation – the “Second Stop”; and
3. Move on into permanent accommodation: private rented sector or social housing

Following a technical appraisal and consultation with the Private Sector Licensing and Planning teams, it was felt there were few barriers to the conversion works. Additionally, the Council’s own in-house Repairs and Maintenance Team would be able to undertake the conversion works and the works could be done with the potential for re-conversion into dwellings at a future date. Given the need for the shelter to be operational for winter 2019, with a target of 31 October 2019, a planning application had been made, pending Committee approval.

It was felt a third party management organisation would be best placed to deliver the management of the accommodation, and the Council would require them to demonstrate

they were self-sustaining (the Council would only levy a peppercorn rent on no more than a five year term to assist this) through the invitation of expressions of interest.

Regrettably, the bid was unsuccessful, with the feedback being that other projects were preferred with a sooner start date (it is predicted the works would be complete by 01 October 2019).

It is likely a third party would be deterred from managing the project if it was required to make capital investment into the building. Given the potential of this building, and the stated policy aim of ending rough sleeping, the Committee were being requested to consider the use of £130k of General Fund reserves to deliver this project.

Budget forecast based on above

Capital works	2018/19
Building works – internal conversion	£50k
Kitchens and bathrooms	£32.5k
Fire Safety works	£18.5k
Security and CCTV	£5k
External works	£15k
Professional fees	£9k
Total	£130k

Corby BC was committed to ending rough sleeping within the Borough. The report's recommendations covered a range of activities that sought to ensure an appropriate response to the current challenges to delivering an end to rough sleeping, bearing in mind a best value approach to the use of the Council's resources and of Government funding.

Councillor Watt spoke in support of the report and welcomed the proposals. Councillor Watt indicated that he had developed an understanding of the wider issues leading to rough sleeping and the needs of the homeless. Councillor Watt stressed that it was not only about providing accommodation but providing support, counselling and guidance to assist rough sleepers in securing permanent accommodation, employment etc.

Councillor Addison welcomed the report and felt that it was important that the Council ensured that it followed best practice particularly around the management of the programme.

Councillor T Beattie agreed that best practice needed to be followed and the management of the facility needed to be robust and professional.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The information provided on current rough sleeper issues within the Borough be noted;
- ii) The proposals for the use of the £115,000 Rough Sleeper Initiative Fund be agreed and the subsequent changes to budgets;
- iii) The temporary increase in the establishment of one post for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 be agreed;

- iv) The allocation of £130,000 from the General Fund reserves for the capital works to Dorking House be agreed and to continue with the appropriate planning and licensing applications; and
- v) Agreement be given for the invitation for expressions of interest in relation to:
 - a) Funding to support governance arrangements;
 - b) Hosting a Move-On Coordinator; and
 - c) The management of the night shelter.

5. Budget Monitoring and Draft Outturn 2019/2019

The report set out the 2018/2019 provisional outturn position for the year in relation to the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme. It also requested approval for the carry forward of certain unspent budgets and transfers to reserves.

The General Fund showed a provisional underspend of £612,000 against a gross budget of £54m. Significant variances were detailed within the report.

Carry forwards were proposed for certain projects where specific budgets were allocated in 2018/19 but where expenditure had not fully incurred. In some cases the funding had already been received from external sources but not yet spent. Not completing the project would therefore result in repaying the funding. Where this was the case, the funders had agreed to carry forward the unspent amounts.

The proposed carry forwards totalling £534k were detailed within the report.

Members noted that the General Fund reserves at the end of the 2018/19 totalled around £11m. However, members were reminded that the Council had agreed to draw down up to £5m of reserves to fund an expansive capital programme in 2019/20. Whilst it was possible that some of this may be funded from capital receipts, a significant proportion would also need to be met from reserves.

In view of this, the previous method of allocating reserves to specific risks would not allow a sufficient level of reserves to be identified. However, since the decision to move to 2 Unitary Council's within Northamptonshire had now been made by the Secretary of State, several of the medium to long term risks had reduced.

It was being proposed to only allocate specific reserves to specific risks where there was a clear short term and significant risk. The remaining balances could then be allocated to a general medium term funding reserve that could be used for any risks or funding requests as they materialised. It was noted that a reserve could only be spent once and unless it was replenished from a revenue or windfall contribution, it was gone once it has been spent.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) showed a provisional underspend of £24,000 against a gross budget of £23m. A breakdown of the key variances was detailed in the report.

A breakdown of the full capital programme for 2018/2019 was included in the report together with proposed carry forwards where schemes were unfinished.

In conclusion the report indicated that close monitoring during the year had helped to ensure that underspends of £612,000 and £24,000 had been achieved for the General Fund and the HRA and these underspends could now be transferred into reserves.

Reserves had moved in the right direction for a number of years following combined efforts and tough decisions taken by officers and Members. Members were reminded that the Council had agreed to draw down approximately £5m of reserves to support the 2019/20 capital programme. As the Council continued to face significant risks within the General Fund over the next few years, the remaining reserves would help to ensure that these risks and potential pressures would continue to be managed and mitigated.

Councillor Elliston welcomed the report and the financial prudence shown by Corby Borough Council. Councillor Elliston thanked Council officers for ensuring that the Council's finances remained in a sustainable position whilst allowing for some growth.

Councillor Watt queried the cost indicated within the Capital Programme for the development of Wilby Close. Councillor Watt felt that the cost for 4 x 1 bed modular flats seemed excessive and overpriced. The Chief Executive explained that these types of properties were in demand and the style of accommodation was appropriate.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) The 2018/2019 outturn position of the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme as contained in the report be noted;
- ii) The General Fund and Capital Programme carry forward budgets as detailed within the report be approved; and
- iii) The use of and contribution to Reserves as set out in this report be approved.

6. Close of Meeting

Meeting closed at 7:29 pm.