

Cabinet
Wednesday 25 September 2019

Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
at its meeting on Monday 23 September 2019
OSC/283

1. Cabinet Agenda Item 6 – Council Tax Empty Properties Premium

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report FIN/478 of the Head of Corporate Finance.

During the discussion, the following points were expressed:

- Clarification was sought on the exemptions provided from the premium, particularly for those in care.
- It was felt there was a moral duty to implement, particularly given the current housing situation, as it may incentivise owners to bring the properties back into use.
- Recognition that there were currently inspections that took place in various forms to establish empty establishments.
- Acknowledgement that any application to reduce or waive a premium was governed by legislation.
- Explanation was sought as to responses to other authorities that had increased premiums beyond 50%.
- Acknowledgement that there were no costs to the implementation of the scheme.
- Support for the report and for publicity following Full Council in October.

RESOLVED

That the Commission agreed to support the recommendations to the Cabinet.

2. Cabinet Agenda Item 7 – Crawley Homes Additional Staffing Requirements

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report CH/186 of the Head of Crawley Homes.

Councillors made the following comments:

- It was noted that part of recommendation 2.2a within report CH/186 would be amended as follows (changes highlighted in bold): “Approve **four** FTE additional posts of Housing Officer immediately with the provision of **two** further FTE posts to enable efficient rent collection following changes relating to Universal Credit...”
- Acknowledgement that staff receive full training to assist customers. Officers work to facilitate engagement with those in need to identify and resolve issues, as it was recognised that older debts were more difficult to remedy.
- Recognition that currently there was not a timescale for the full rollout for Universal Credit. It was envisaged that the additional posts would be fulltime posts, however it was acknowledged that there was a natural turnover of the workforce and vacant posts would be reviewed as the roll-out of the scheme progressed.
- Acknowledgement that whilst jobs change, it was important that arrears were kept to a minimum as much as possible.
- Clarification was provided as each neighbourhood patch and the number of properties.
- Further information was obtained as to early intervention together with the sanctions that could be applied for those tenants that did not keep to their agreements.
- Confirmation was provided that the Older Persons Service was focused on those in need and tailored to meeting individual needs.
- It was discussed that it would be beneficial for Councillors to gain further experience from staff ‘first hand’. An option was proposed for an introductory office visit for Councillors.

RESOLVED

That Commission agreed to support the recommendations to the Cabinet.

Councillor T Belben
Acting Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
23 September 2019