

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3 JULY 2014**

### **PETITIONS**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Lauren Wallis, Democratic Services Officer

#### **Summary**

This report advises the Committee of the petitions within its remit presented at Council meetings, received by the Council or sent via the e-petition facility, including a summary of officer's response to the petitioners.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The Constitution provides that petitions received by the council relating to matters within the remit of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be referred immediately to the relevant Director for consideration at officer level.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Director is asked to respond to the petition request within 10 working days. The petition organiser may request to refer the matter to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee if s/he is not satisfied with the answer and has given reasons for their dissatisfaction.
- 2.2 If the petition contains at least the number of signatures equating to 5% of Medway's population (currently 12,675 signatures) it will be debated by Full Council unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting.
- 2.3 If the petition contains at least the number of signatures equating to 2% of Medway's population (currently 5,070 signatures) the relevant senior officer may give evidence at a public meeting of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee.

2.4 A petition may also be submitted through the e-petition facility on the Council's website. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions. A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information.

2.5 A summary of the response to all petitions will also be published on the council's website.

### **3. Petitions**

3.1 Since the last meeting of the Committee, one petition containing 15 signatures has been received that falls within the remit of this Committee.

3.2 A summary of the response, which has passed the ten day deadline for a request for referral to the Committee and is therefore seen as acceptable to the petitioners, is set out below.

<b>Subject of Petition</b> (date of receipt: 16 May 2014 - paper petition)
The petition expresses dismay at the increase in rent payments for 2014/15 at Longford Court, Rainham. This increase is despite significant reductions in the warden service. There has been a 15% increase in rent payments in nearly 3 years and the petition is requesting an explanation.
<b>Response from Council</b>
<p>The response to the lead petitioner gives an in-depth explanation of how the Council calculates its rents starting with the setting of the basic rent using the government's rent convergence policy which states rents should increase by September's Retail Price Index/inflation plus 0.5% a year. There is no formal policy for service charge increases but legislation states that the Council should be fair and reasonable, to try to keep the increases as close to the Retail Price Index as possible but with the need to recover costs. The response explains how the Council has put initiatives in place to achieve this aim. The letter also gave details of changes to the Housing Management Service and reasons for those changes.</p> <p>To summarise: (i) basic rent is increased in line with government rent convergence policy and the increase from 2011-14; (ii) Service charges have been increased in order to fully recover the cost of providing the individual services. With the exception of the warden service charge all service charges are now fully recovered; (iii) Rent increases are linked to RPI and not pension increases; and (iv) of the 16 service charges calculated by Medway nine are eligible for housing benefit, 3 are eligible for housing related support and 4 are not eligible for any type of benefit.</p> <p>In conclusion, the petitioners were advised that the Council remains committed to providing a cost effective and efficient service to all residents in our Homes for Living Schemes and that the service is continually reviewed.</p>

#### **4. Risk Management**

- 4.1 The Council has a clear scheme for handling petitions set out in its Constitution. This ensures consistency and clarity of process, minimising the risk of complaints about the administration of petitions.

#### **5. Financial and Legal Implications**

- 5.1 Any financial and/or legal implications arising from the issues raised by the petitions are set out in the comments on the petitions.

#### **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 Members are requested to note the petition response and officer action as set out in paragraph 3 of the report.

#### **Background papers**

None.

#### **Contact for further details:**

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