

Date of issue: 6th October, 2009

MEETING

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Councillors Mann (Chair), Coad, Cryer, Davis,
A S Dhaliwal, Pabbi and Walsh)(3 BILLD Vacancies)

DATE AND TIME:

THURSDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 2009 AT 6.30 PM

VENUE:

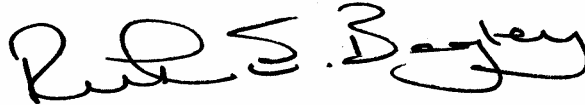
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, BATH ROAD,
SLOUGH

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
OFFICER:
(for all enquiries)**

KEVIN BARRETT
(01753) 875014

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



RUTH BAGLEY
Chief Executive

NOTE TO MEMBERS

This meeting is an approved duty for the payment of travel expenses.

AGENDA

PART I

**AGENDA
ITEM**

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

WARD

Apologies for absence.

AGENDA
ITEM

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

WARD

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest.

(Members are reminded of their duty to declare personal and personal prejudicial interests in matters coming before this meeting as set out in the Local Code of Conduct).

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 3rd September, 2009. 1 - 10

SCRUTINY ISSUES

3. Local Area Commander, Thames Valley Police.

(Superintendent Chris Shead, Slough Local Area Commander is attending the meeting to present on policing issues in Slough and to answer Members' questions.)

4. Member Call-in - Child Protection Policies and Practices. 11 - 16

5. Performance and Financial Monitoring for 2009/10.

(REPORT TO FOLLOW)

6. Private Sector Housing and Houses in Multiple Occupation - Surveys 2009 17 - 20

7. Forward Agenda Plan. 21 - 22

8. Update on Issues Raised at Scrutiny Surgeries. 23 - 24

9. Attendance Record. 25 - 26

10. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday, 19th November, 2009.

Press and Public

You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before the Committee considers any items in the Part II agenda. Special facilities may be made available for disabled or non-English speaking persons. Please contact the Democratic Services Officer shown above for further details.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd September, 2009.

Present:- Councillors Mann (Chair), Coad, Cryer (until 9.35 p.m.), Davis, A S Dhaliwal (until 9.05 p.m.) and Walsh.

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Parmar.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Pabbi.

PART I

22. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

23. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 2nd July, 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24. Membership of the Committee and Scrutiny Panels

The Committee was advised that since its last meeting, Councillor Cryer had been appointed in place of Councillor Basharat and Councillor Pabbi in place of Councillor Pantelic. In addition, because of the appointment of Councillor Pantelic to the Cabinet, she was no longer entitled to serve on any scrutiny bodies and the Labour Group had nominated Councillor O'Connor to the consequent vacancies on the Education and Children's Services and Health Scrutiny Panels. The Committee was requested to formally approve Councillor O'Connor's appointment to the Panel.

Resolved – That Councillor O'Connor be appointed to the Education and Children's Services and Health Scrutiny Panels in place of Councillor Pantelic.

25. Adjournment

The Chair noted that he would call a short adjournment at about 7.45 p.m. if any Muslim Members or Officers were present and wished to break their fast.

26. Performance and Financial Reporting for 2009/10

The Strategic Director of Improvement and Development and the Interim Strategic Director of Resources presented a report highlighting the Council's overall performance and focusing particularly on performance management, debt recovery, treasury management and capital and revenue monitoring. Particular attention was drawn to the first quarter report on the Council-wide 'Balanced Scorecard' which provided advice on the Council's overall performance in a number of critical service areas. Of the 60 indicators in the

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Scorecard, 21 were showing as green, 2 as amber and 4 as red with the remaining 32 having either not yet had targets set or the first quarter performance had not yet been finalised. The Strategic Director drew attention to areas of significant improvement where performance had exceeded targets and to those areas which had been flagged up as “red” and targeted action would be required to improve the situation.

The Interim Director of Resources outlined the current financial position of the authority drawing attention in particular to the various challenges facing the Council, including the level of Council Tax collection which was proving problematical at a time of recession.

Members raised the following issues of concern in the subsequent debate:-

- With regard to NI8 (Adult Participation in Sport) the Committee noted that Slough’s performance was extremely poor as against the England average and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) target and was at the bottom end of the lowest quartile nationally. Officers reported that the Slough Sport and Physical Activity Forum had developed an action plan to encourage wider participation across all age groups including a range of measures to ameliorate the situation and these actions and progress were being monitored by the Health and Wellbeing Partnership Delivery Group (PDG). Members expressed their serious concern at this situation and, whilst noting that issues such as the diversity of the population were a particular issue for Slough, felt that, given Slough’s particular health issues, a more detailed scrutiny of this area would be helpful. Officers were asked to arrange for a detailed report on the action being taken to address this issue to be submitted to the Community, Leisure & Environment Scrutiny Panel with representatives of the Health and Wellbeing PDG invited to attend as appropriate.
- Members noted an increase of 16% in the assault with less serious injury crime rate over the same period last year, although the overall severity of the violence in Slough had reduced. Details were presented of the range of measures that had been put in place to tackle this particular issue. Officers added that whilst the overall severity of violence recorded in Slough had been reducing, there was still concern that the base figure for Slough was above the national trend with the overall level of crime at a higher level than would be expected.

Members felt that the use of percentages was less helpful than actual crime figures and it was important that future reports on areas such as this gave more detail of the actual level and types of crime including for examples the levels of domestic violence in the town. Officers undertook to speak to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Thames Valley Police with a view to more detailed information being provided at future meetings.

Members referred to the ongoing problem of inadequate policing resources in Slough as compared to the position in other, densely

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populated areas and the problems that this was causing. The Chief Executive confirmed that recent figures demonstrated that the level of policing in Slough both in terms of per head of population and per crime was well below that of all of the metropolitan areas despite the fact that this town was similar in many ways to those areas. Members suggested that the matter should be raised at a senior level with the Thames Valley Police and the Chief Executive undertook to write to the Chief Constable outlining the Committee's concerns on the level of resourcing. It was also noted that the Local Area Commander would be attending the next meeting of the Committee and the Chief Executive undertook to brief him on the Committee's concerns in advance of his visit.

It was suggested that the views of the Committee on police resourcing were shared by the local force and that they were likely to welcome the support of the Committee in seeking additional police numbers or other resources for the Slough area. The view was expressed that Slough's particular problems, including the diversity and transient nature of its residents, the under-counting of its population and the "Heathrow effect" whereby the problems associated with the proximity to a large international airport including drugs, etc, had not been fully taken into account by the Thames Valley Force. For these reasons, amongst others, Slough could not be compared with other non-metropolitan areas around the country because of its particular needs.

- The Committee viewed the local indicator on staff appraisals with concern. This appeared to indicate that the number of appraisals being undertaken by managers across the authority was well below what it should be and Members requested that urgent management action be taken to ensure that appraisals were undertaken on time and the necessary paperwork passed to the Human Resources Department. Officers agreed that the current position was unacceptable and the matter would be taken up immediately. Members requested an update with detailed figures to its next meeting.
- Members again drew attention to the disappointing performance with regard to the average telephone queuing time for general enquiries to the Customer Service Centre. The introduction of the voicemail option had resulted in people holding on for longer rather than leaving a voicemail as had been hoped. Officers commented that the existing business model had not met expectations and that, whilst waiting times had reduced, they were still too high. Increases had been made in the number of staff at the Centre but the number of calls continued to grow due in large part to the current recession. The Strategic Director of Improvement and Development was leading a project reviewing how the public was dealt with and he reminded the Committee that a report on this issue was programmed for its November meeting. He hoped that an improvement in waiting times could be demonstrated by that time.

Members suggested a number of ways of improving the situation including the possibility of longer opening hours or introducing a system whereby

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telephone callers were informed how many people were before them in the queue. However, longer opening hours would have budgetary implications and the difficulty with giving information on the numbers in the queue was that it was impossible, given the very complex nature of some calls, to give callers a realistic expectation as to how long they may have to wait. However, a range of options were currently under consideration by Officers to improve the current performance.

- Further information was sought by Members on the level of Council Tax collection. The Interim Director of Resources responded that there were a number of difficulties peculiar to Slough including population “churn” both in terms of people moving in and out of the town as well as within the Borough and the current recession and levels of unemployment. This led to a huge volume of work for staff in identifying and chasing individuals liable to pay Council Tax and a large level of legal enforcement which was well above the levels required in many similar authorities. However, the Council had a legal duty to attempt to collect as much of its Council Tax as was possible. He outlined the procedures that the Council undertook in this regard and, in response to a question, stated that he did not feel that the policies in Slough were particularly different from those in other areas as regards initiating court action, etc. but that Slough had an extremely challenging climate for the collection of the tax.
- A Member referred to the Council’s current banking contract with the Co-operative bank and the proposal to extend it for a further two years which would provide sufficient flexibility and timespan to enable the Shared Services project to progress without long term commitment to a new banking contract. He asked whether the Shared Services initiative could give rise to a situation whereby the Council lost control of its own banking arrangements. The Interim Director responded that he found it extremely difficult to envisage a situation where the authority would not have its own banking arrangements.
- With regard to the current position in respect of the Heritable Icelandic Bank, a Member asked whether it would be possible to comment on the likely net loss to the Council on this investment. The Interim Director commented that it was not possible to quantify any loss at this stage but that a prudent approach was being adopted in case all of the monies were not recovered.
- Members noted the current position on the revenue budget which showed a projected overspend for 2009/10 of £1.1m, an increase of £237,000 over that reported in the previous month. This position, coupled with the possible pressures identified from emerging issues aligned to additional client activity across social care, gave some cause for concern at the likelihood of being able to deliver a balanced budget at year end. The Interim Director responded that recovery plans were in place across all directorates but acknowledged that the Council would be severely stretched to bring the budget into balance. The Chief Executive added that the Corporate Management Team was actively considering what

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action it could take at this stage in the financial year to ensure that a balanced budget was achieved.

- A Member referred to the savings identified in respect of home care and sought assurances that this would not be to the detriment of vulnerable individuals in the town. Officers responded that there was currently no evidence that any vulnerable individuals were at risk but front line managers would as ever need to be vigilant in ensuring that the needs of clients were properly met. Members reiterated that at a time of funding difficulty, it was essential that those receiving home care and similar services were not deprived of the care they needed. Reference was also made to the essential role which was already being played by the voluntary sector and the need to ensure that the Council fully engaged with them, particularly over the coming years when the financial position was likely to get worse.

Members requested that more detailed information on service levels and expenditure in respect of home care should be provided for the Health Scrutiny Panel so that it could monitor the position. In addition, the Chief Executive stated that she was already conscious of the important role played by the voluntary and community sector, particularly as far as adult social care was concerned and she undertook to speak to the Chairman of the Slough Council for Voluntary Service on the concerns expressed by the Committee. She also added that the LSP was fully aware of the current situation and that the SCVS were members of that body.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that the various actions identified by Members be taken forward by officers and reported back as appropriate.

27. **Comprehensive Area Assessment - The Audit Commission's Perspective**

Elizabeth Hale, the CAA Lead for Berkshire, and Kam Shergill of the Audit Commission attended the meeting to outline the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), explaining that it looked at how public services worked together in an area as well as individual organisational performance, focused on local as well as national priorities and provided a robust but proportionate assessment of local services. Ms Hale outlined the process and timetable and drew attention to the challenges facing Slough and the themes within the Council's local Sustainable Community Strategy. The area assessment looked at how well local priorities expressed community needs and aspirations, how well the outcomes and improvements needed were being delivered, and what the prospects were for improvement. Whilst the area assessment was still in the process of drafting, Ms Hale gave the Committee some feedback on the initial findings, drawing attention in particular to the possibility of a "red flag" in respect of the partnership's capacity to deliver improvement on crime and fear of crime.

Members raised the following issues in the subsequent discussion:-

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- A Member sought clarification as to why consideration was currently being given to a red flag in respect of improvement on crime and the fear of crime given the comments made on an earlier agenda item concerning the particular difficulties Slough had with regard to underresourcing by the Thames Valley Police and the particular problems arising from a transient and highly diverse population. Ms Hale responded that whilst red flags were likely to be rare, one may be given where a priority area had been identified and there was insufficient evidence that it was being adequately addressed or there were significant concerns about future outcomes. It could also be given in the case where the inspectors did not have confidence that a partnership understood and had plans in place to tackle a particular issue.

Several Members expressed their extreme concern at this situation, given that, whilst Borough Councillors were democratically elected and accountable to local people, other members of the partnership were not and it was not always within the ability of the Council to influence those partners sufficiently. In this particular instance, there was a possibility of a red flag at least in part because the Thames Valley Police at a strategic level had not adequately resourced policing in the town. However, the local population would be unlikely to distinguish between the various partners and would be likely to blame the Borough Council for all poor performance in the town, whether or not it was directly responsible.

Members added that it was essential that the assessment took fully into account the very difficult circumstances in Slough including but not limited to an aging population, an increasing birth rate, a substantial under-counting of the local population which had been acknowledged at national level, the under-resourcing of the police force as compared to all other metropolitan areas in the country and issues as referred to earlier in respect of the proximity to Heathrow airport which gave rise to particular issues around drugs, etc. Members expressed the strong view that proper recognition of these issues should be taken into account in the area assessment.

Ms Hale responded that the role of the CAA was not to apportion blame to particular partners but to examine how well the partnership was delivering against its priorities. Whilst funding was recognised to be an issue, that was not the focus of the CAA, although the likelihood was that issues such as those referred to above may be mentioned in the introductory paragraphs setting the context. She added that elected Members were involved in the setting of the priorities and parameters for the LSP and Scrutiny Members also had an important role in monitoring performance and deciding how best to use the time available for scrutiny to concentrate on the issues of most concern.

She added that a red flag may be given where there was concern that a number of areas of data were poor and this would arise out of a cross-inspectorate view, not merely the view of the Audit Commission. She

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added that the latest data would be taken into account so that the final report would contain the most up to date information.

- A Member referred to the role of the elected Members and the fact that, at a time of increasingly scarce resources for local government, the Members' role would be likely to become much more limited as their aspirations may not be feasible given the financial situation. Ms Hale commented that Members would have an essential role in allocating scarce resources and it was therefore essential that a proper challenge and prioritisation role was undertaken. She added that one of the important judgements made within the CAA was to comment on value for money in what the partnership was undertaking and this would become increasingly important.
- Reference was made to the recent successful bid to the migration impact fund and the CAA would be looking at how this would be allocated. The Chief Executive commented that Slough had secured over a third of the available funding for the whole of South-East region and this should be properly recognised in the assessment.
- In response to a question about possible green flags in the assessment, whereby exceptional performance, improvement or innovation was signalled, Ms Hale referred to the Council's work in responding to the recession, skills development and the 'Prevent' agenda. She could give no assurances at this stage that green flags would be allocated but these were particularly strong areas for the partnership.
- Members again sought assurances that the assessment when published would recognise the particular difficulties of the town, not least the undercounting of its population. Ms Hale stated that the position had already been acknowledged and taken into account in some of the value for money assessments although she was not yet sure how valid it was to comment on that issue although it was likely to be acknowledged in the contextual section of the report. She reiterated that the CAA was about how the partnership operated rather than around funding issues but she acknowledged the serious concerns expressed by Members.

On completion of the questioning, the Chair thanked Ms Hale and Ms Shergill for their presentation and for their responses to Members' questions.

Resolved – That the current position be noted.

28. **Involvement in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

The Committee was reminded that it had requested at its meeting on 16th April, 2009 further information about broader Member involvement and the engagement of the local community in the LSP process. The Assistant Director, Transformational Change and the LSP Manager introduced a report addressing the issues and outlining a number of identified gaps and areas for improvement. The arrangements for engaging elected Members as well as

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the voluntary and community sectors were outlined and information was provided on the programme of electing and training Community Champions who represented the views of the Community Network, a body bringing together a large number of voluntary and community groups in Slough. The report concluded that the partnership had made progress in developing its engagement and involvement strategy and individual Partnership Delivery Groups had started to develop mechanisms to secure the engagement of stakeholders on a more regular basis. In addition, the LSP was working closely with the Slough Council for Voluntary Service to utilise the Community Champions resource.

Members welcomed the information provided and suggested that it would be helpful for a regular, possibly quarterly update to be provided to the Committee on the work of the LSP. In addition, it would be helpful if reports were made to the appropriate Scrutiny Panels in respect of progress against the various Local Area Agreement targets.

A Member referred to the work being done with the Muslim community under the auspices of Slough Against Violent Extremism and asked what work was being done with other communities in the Borough. She also expressed the view that, proportionally, Sikhs experienced a higher number of racist attacks than Muslims and expressed hope that this had been picked up by the LSP. The Chief Executive responded that the issue of racist attacks against Sikhs would certainly be picked up and taken up to the relevant PDG for discussion. The work under Slough Against Violent Extremism was a separate issue but the Member's comments would be taken back. Members requested that the LSP be requested to respond to the concerns expressed in respect of these issues.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that Officers report back on the work being undertaken in respect of Slough Against Violent Extremism and to counter racist attacks on the different communities in the town.

29. Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder

The Head of Drugs and Community Safety introduced a report informing the Committee about new legislative provisions relating to the scrutiny of crime and disorder and suggesting a way forward in this area of work. It was being suggested that, as Community Safety was within the portfolio of the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel, it would be the most appropriate Panel to scrutinise crime and disorder issues. The matter had been considered by the Panel at its recent meeting and it had expressed a willingness to take on this work, with two meetings each year earmarked to look at crime and disorder issues and an in-depth scrutiny of two matters.

Members discussed the current role of the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs), some expressing concerns at how they had operated insofar as the inclusion of the local Councillors was concerned. It was pointed out that the NAGs had been a police initiative which had been to some extent imposed on

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the Borough but that there were now some examples of good practice and the position around the town was developing over time with local Ward Councillors now being far more welcome to attend and engage in the process. Reference was also made to the work currently being undertaken by the Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment on community engagement with all parts of the public sector and a report would be coming forward in due course.

Members welcomed the proposals and it was -

Resolved – That the approach suggested in respect of the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters in Slough be approved.

30. 'Councillor Call for Action' - Briefing Note

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report informing Members of new scrutiny provisions arising from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The legislation introduced the “Councillor Call for Action” which allowed Members to refer any “local government matter” for consideration by the relevant Scrutiny Committee. The thinking behind this new power was that it could be used when all other attempts at a resolution in a neighbourhood had failed. It was not designed to provide an immediate solution but offered a chance to bring an issue to a wider audience for discussion. It could include such matters as sustained poor performance at a local school; poor maintenance of a park leading to increased anti-social behaviour; or a series of complaints about refuse collection services which may demonstrate systemic failures. The focus of the CCfA was on neighbourhood or locality issues and specifically the quality of public service provision in a locality. It should represent a genuine local community concern and should be a persistent problem which the local Councillor has been unable to resolve through local action and discussion with the Cabinet or relevant services and agencies. As with the current call-in procedure, individual complaints could not be forwarded and a number of areas were specifically prohibited including planning and licensing applications and appeals and Council Tax/Housing Benefit complaints.

Given the existing call-in procedures, it was suggested that Officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee give consideration to an appropriate procedure incorporating the new provisions to sit alongside and complement existing call-in procedures. A report would be brought back to the Committee suggesting a protocol for the Councillor Call for Action.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that a further report be brought to the Committee with a suggested procedure and protocol for the “Councillor Call for Action”, following discussions between the Officers and Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

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31. Forward Agenda Plan

The Committee noted its agenda plan for future meetings. A Member suggested that the current policy for dealing with incursions by travellers on Council land needed to be reviewed and this was agreed.

Reference was also made to a number of matters raised at the Scrutiny Surgeries and the Officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair would take the appropriate action to respond to them.

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted and amended as agreed.

32. Attendance Record

Noted.

33. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday, 8th October, 2009

It was noted that a request had been received from the Vice-Chair to change the date of the next meeting programmed for Thursday, 8th October. Members expressed their willingness to amend the date, provided the Local Area Police Commander was able to attend.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 9.50 p.m.)

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview & Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 15th October, 2009

CONTACT OFFICER: Kevin Barrett, Democratic Services Manager
(01753) 875014

WARD(S): All

PART I
FOR CONSIDERATION

MEMBER CALL-IN – CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

1. Purpose of Report

To advise the Committee of the receipt of a Member call-in and to seek the Committee's views and instructions on how it wishes to deal with it.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to consider the call-in from Councillor Stokes and to decide what action it wishes to take in response to it and instruct officers accordingly.

3. Community Strategy Priorities

None arising from this administrative report.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 A Member call-in has been received from Councillor Stokes, a copy of which is attached as an Appendix to this report. Given the breadth of the subject matter involved, it was considered appropriate to refer the call-in to this Committee in the first instance to seek instructions as to what action the Committee wishes to take in response to it.
- 4.2 The Committee may take the following action on a call-in:-
- Consider the matter itself at this or a future meeting and pass comments or recommendations to the Cabinet for other appropriate body.
 - Refer the call-in to the appropriate Scrutiny Panel for consideration and report back.
 - Establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the subject matter of the call-in in detail and report back.
 - Take no action on the call-in, the reason for any such decision to be recorded in the minutes and the Member who called the issue in to be so advised.

Implications of the Call-in

- 4.3 Councillor Stokes's call-in seeks to scrutinise both the Borough Council and all relevant partners in respect of their child protection policies and practices. The Borough Council's partners in child protection include the three local health authorities (Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, the Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals Trust and the Berkshire Healthcare Trust), the Thames Valley Police, the local voluntary sector and the Probation Service, amongst others. It will be noted that Councillor Stokes has suggested that all relevant partners be invited to separate meetings to facilitate the scrutiny of individual policies and practices and to assess partner co-ordination.
- 4.4 Members should note that all of these partners are members of the Slough Local Safeguarding Children Board, established arising out of the recommendations of Lord Laming, and whose role specifically is to ensure that the child protection procedures across the partners are fit for purpose and regularly scrutinised. The Board has an independent Chair and has recently been involved in the revision and republication of the child protection procedures across Berkshire and these are now available on-line to all agencies as well as to the general public. Members may wish to consider whether a detailed scrutiny as suggested by Councillor Stokes would to some extent duplicate the work already being undertaken by the Safeguarding Board.
- 4.5 As well as the role of the Safeguarding Board, Members will also wish to take into account the other forms of scrutiny that child protection has been subject to in the last year. These include –
- External scrutiny from Ofsted, as well as requests from the DCSF and the Government Office of the South-East for information over the last nine months following the death of baby Peter.
 - Report and briefing at Council in December 2008.
 - Reports to the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel in June, 2009 and again in October on the recent unannounced Ofsted inspection.
 - Three discussions at the Local Strategic Partnership in the last year.
 - A considerable amount of officer time has also been dedicated to briefing and training Councillors on their safeguarding role.
- 4.6 If Members wish to undertake a detailed scrutiny, there are several options that could be considered. One option would be to establish a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) of Councillors with the time to commit to a series of daytime meetings. Assuming this proved possible, it would also be necessary to devote officer resources to organising such meetings and carrying out any necessary research required. At the present time, the Council has only allocated one post of scrutiny support officer which is currently occupied on a secondment basis to support all of the Council's scrutiny work. It would be necessary to identify additional officer resources to support a T&FG in the terms envisaged by Councillor Stokes.

- 4.7 A T&FG as envisaged above could have significant resource implications for the time of officers both within the Borough Council and in partner organisations, including possibly the risk of agencies spending time serving the Group instead of spending their time on managing child protection work. Accordingly if a T&FG is proposed, the Committee needs to be very clear about its purpose, remit and timescale, and why it is required outside of the existing inspection, scrutiny and LSCB processes.
- 4.8 A second option would be to ask for a briefing by the Strategic Director of Education & Children's Services on the authority's child protection policies and practices and to outline the role of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in engaging all partners in child protection and ensuring that best practice is followed in referral processes and arranging for appropriate training to be undertaken for staff in all agencies. Such a briefing could be made either to this Committee at a future meeting or at the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel. The advantage of this option is that it would enable Members to consider the robustness of the existing scrutiny arrangements before considering further action.
- 4.9 A third option could be for the Committee to ask the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel to itself undertake a detailed scrutiny of child protection procedures to satisfy itself of their robustness.
- 4.10 The Committee's instructions are requested.

5. **Appendix**

Appendix A – Call-in from Councillor Stokes.

6. **Background Papers**

None.

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25th August 2009

To: - Sunita Sharma

Copies to: - Ruth Bagley, Councillor Derek Cryer, and Members of the BILLD and Conservative Groups

Dear Sunita

Re: - The Overview and Scrutiny Process

As I explained in our recent constructive conversation Ruth Bagley asked me if I could endeavour to persuade the BILLD Group to participate fully in the Overview and Scrutiny process. I have discussed the issue with those members who are not away on holiday. The BILLD Group members are not inflexible in attitude. They all believe that an effective Scrutiny process would be beneficial and in the interests of residents, staff and SBC. Consequently they would like to participate fully and make the process a success. Recent developments have done nothing, however, to change their perception that the controlling Labour Group is still determined to manipulate and control the process. As several members have emphasised, three different BILLD Group leaders have raised the Issue at Chief Executive/Group Leaders Meetings without securing any firm commitment from the Labour Group Leader to even limited reform. (I have not circulated copies of this letter to the Controlling Group because to do so would immediately invite wrecking tactics!)

As I mentioned, after further discussion with Councillor Munkley we have agreed that I should initiate an Individual Member Call-in on an important subject. If that call-in is allowed to proceed and is not sabotaged it might encourage BILLD Group members to modify their opinions. I have not completed the Member Call-In form because the form does not provide for the call-in I have in mind. The form demands one of three criteria: -

1. A decision or proposed decision of the Cabinet or a Committee detailed, or
2. The decision of an Officer taken under delegated authority, or
3. A review of other executive functions of SBC or matters connected with those functions.

These requirements need to be revised. They are too narrow and too introspective. As defined they would prevent the cross Partner scrutiny that the Government and the Audit Commission are seeking to encourage. The topic that I have selected does not meet the above criteria. Nevertheless it is important and it is one that the Government, the Local Government Association, the Audit Commission, Ofsted, Lord Laming, Judges, the NSPCC, the Salvation Army and University Research Units have all emphasised requires immediate and continuing scrutiny. The topic is: -

*** Child Protection Policies and Practices within the Borough of Slough as pursued by Slough Borough Council, NHS Authorities, the Police, the Probation Service, the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, and any other relevant Partners within the Borough of Slough.**

I have selected this topic as my Individual Member Call-in for four main reasons: -

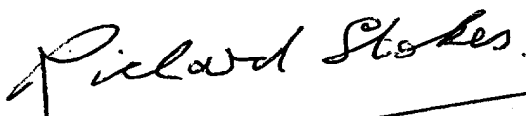
- Child Protection is of obvious importance to the people of Slough, especially all our children.
- The Government, the LGA, the Audit Commission, Ofsted, Lord Laming, several Judges, the NSPCC, the Salvation Army and University Research Units have all emphasised the lack of adequate scrutiny in Child Policies and Practices and the urgent need to initiate a thorough examination and analysis of all Child Protection Policies and Practices.
- Slough Borough Council has not previously effectively initiated this particular scrutiny.
- For some months I have been pursuing an individual scrutiny process and I have acquired enough evidence to satisfy me beyond doubt that there are serious deficiencies (especially with the policies and practices of two of our Partners).

I envisage the following scrutiny process: -

- SBC and all the relevant partners would be invited to explain and discuss their Child Protection Policies and Practices.
- The relevant Partners would be invited to separate meetings in order to facilitate the scrutiny of individual policies and practices and to assess Partner co-ordination.
- The invitations would be extended in "broad topic" terms without including detailed questions. (This is important to prevent the "public relations" responses that detailed pre-meeting questions often invite.)
- As the process could involve six meetings some meetings should be held during the day time to avoid excessive evening demands on Officers.
- Where appropriate meetings should be held on Partner premises to help with the facilitation of requests for urgent additional information which might arise during a meeting.
- Ideally the Scrutiny Panel should include some Members with investigative skills and who have read Lord Laming's reports. (For example, Councillor O'Connor is knowledgeable and is concerned about Child Protection. I do recognise that she has a health problem but as she is no longer a member of the Cabinet she might be prepared to serve on a specialist scrutiny Panel).
- During and at the end of the Scrutiny process we should make action recommendations and subsequently scrutinise the implementation, partial implementation, or non-implementation of those recommendations.

Would you please discuss any problems or difficulties with me?

Thank you.


Richard Stokes

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 15th October 2009

CONTACT OFFICER: Manju Dhar, Private Sector Housing Manager
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 875251

WARD(S): All

PART I
FOR INFORMATION

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) SURVEYS 2009

1. **Purpose of Report**

The propose of this report is to feed back to O&S the results of the Private Sector housing and HMOs condition surveys

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the report

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

The report contributes to the emerging priorities in the Community Strategy of

- **Being Safe, Feeling Safe**
- **A Cleaner, Greener place to live, Work and Play**
- **Prosperity for All**

4. **Other Implications**

Financial There are no financial implications of proposed action". At this stage

Risk Management None at this stage

Human Rights Act and Other Legal

There are no Human Rights Act Implications at this stage.

5. We have now received the draft report of the private sector stock and HMOs condition Surveys commissioned in August 2008 to assess residential properties in all private housing sectors within Slough. The final report will be published at the end of October 2009.

Main outputs from the surveys are:

- An assessment of the housing and occupants under the decent homes standard
- Profile of the housing stock

- Number of homes with category one and two hazards (Housing act 2006)
- State of disrepair of private sector homes
- Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Energy efficiency of homes

5.1 **Profile of Stock**

It is estimated that there are 39,814 private sector dwellings in the Borough; of these 740 are empty.

Data from the survey suggests that the private sector housing stock in Slough has a notably different profile to the housing stock nationally. When compared with national data some of the main differences found were:

- The Borough has a higher than average proportion of private rented accommodation, with 23.2% of all private sector dwellings being in this sector, compared to 14.5% across England. An estimated 76.8% of private sector dwellings are therefore in the owner-occupied sector.
- There are approximately 157 long term (over 6 months) vacant properties

5.2 **Housing Health and Safety Rating System**

This is nationally adopted method of identifying defects in a dwelling which have the potential of causing injury or death to the occupiers. Local authorities have a statutory duty to take action where a defect is deemed to be a “Category 1 Hazard”

- It is estimated that 17.3 % of private sector dwellings have at least one category 1 hazard.
- The highest incidents of category 1 hazards are within the private rented sector (27.5 %),
- Properties having such hazards are occupied predominantly by vulnerable households.

5.3 **Energy Efficiency**

An energy rating is intended to give a measure of the overall energy efficiency of a dwelling. The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) is the Government’s recommended system for home energy rating. The SAP rating is standardised for floor area so that the size of the dwelling does not strongly affect the result.

- The average SAP rating for the private sector in Slough is 55. This compares with an average private sector SAP of 47 for England in 2006. The most recent SAP estimate for the South East of England (2003) for the private sector is 51,
- A greater proportion of vulnerable households have very low SAP ratings. Overall it is estimated that 17.2% of vulnerable households have a SAP of less than 40, this compares with only 12.2% of other households.
- Overall, 6,207 private sector households in Slough are in fuel poverty. This represents 15.9% of private sector households in the Borough.
- Households in the private rented sector are most likely to be considered fuel poor, with 28.5% of those in the private rented sector in fuel poverty.

5.4 **Decent Homes**

The Government defines a home as 'decent' if it meets all of the following four criteria:

- No Category 1 hazards
 - Is in a reasonable state of repair
 - It has reasonably modern facilities and services
 - It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort
- 28.3% of dwellings failed the standard under one or more of these headings. This figure compares with a national estimate (for private sector dwellings) of 36.3%.
 - The total cost of remedying non-decent homes in the Borough is estimated to be £34.0m, which equates to approximately £3,017 per non-decent dwelling

5.5 **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**

- Overall, it was estimated that there are over 3,500 HMOs.
- The survey data also suggested that HMOs are more likely to be found in the Upton, Central and Chalvey Wards.
- HMOs are more likely to have a Category 1 hazard than other private sector dwellings and higher levels of non-decency.
- 31% of these properties were considered to be inadequately or poorly managed.

5.6 **The Private Rented Sector**

- The total privately rented stock is 23½ %. An estimated 27.5% of private rented dwellings have a Category 1 hazard
- 42.4% of private rented dwellings were found to be non-decent, which is significantly higher than owner-occupied sector dwellings.

5.7 **Overcrowding**

The report shows that overcrowding exists in 22% of dwellings.

6. **Implications for Private Sector Housing**

Specifically, these include:

- Reducing the number of dwellings with a Category 1 hazard under HHSRS standards (as stated in the Housing Act 2004).
- Increase the number of households living in decent homes, specifically the proportion of private sector housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable households.
- Reducing energy consumption and domestic carbon dioxide emissions of private sector stock under the 1995 Home Energy Conservation Act
- Reducing the number of vacant properties as part of an Empty Homes Strategy.

- Licensing HMOs and improving the number in a good condition under the Housing Act 2004.
- Review of all our policies against the new data to ensure that we are targeting and using our resources effectively and meeting the needs of the community.

We will use our existing resources and the funding allocated from other sources such as the migration bid funding from the Government to continue to address the concerns raised.

7. A copy of the full report will be available in the Members' Room by the end of October.

8. **Background Papers**

2009 Private Sector stock and Houses in Multiple Occupation condition survey.

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
FORWARD AGENDA PLAN 2009/10

Meeting	Policy Reviews, Etc.	Audit/Performance Monitoring/Other	Final Report Deadline (5 pm)
19th November 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action to Improve Performance at MyCouncil (Z Miller) • Place Survey (K Gordon) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report ((Director of Resources) 	6th November
14th January 2010		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report (Director of Resources) 	31st December
4th February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget & Council Tax (Director of Resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report (Director of Resources) 	22nd January
25th February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Constable, TVP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report (Director of Resources) 	12th February
15th April 2010		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report (Director of Resources) 	31st March
Unprogrammed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broom & Poplar – Performance of Pellings ((J Bell/S Pathak) • Post-Implementation Review of Art @ the Centre Scheme (G Ralphs/R Kirkham) • Post-implementation Review of Top 30 Capital Projects (to be submitted as Reviews are completed) • Implications of 3rd Heathrow Runway • Impact of Recession and Use of Sustainable Communities Act and Well-being powers (R Chohan) • Regular Reports on the Work of the LSP (including issues of racist attacks against Sikhs & Slough Against 		

	<p>Violent Extremism) (K Gordon/N Mohammed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further Report on S.236 of LG & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (Delegation of Powers to Members) (S Sharma/K Barrett)• Policy on Removal of Travellers from Council Land (D Alder/S Quayle)		
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SCRUTINY SURGERIES – ITEMS RAISED

Item	Proposed action
1.Future of the Town Hall	A number of reports have previously been submitted to the Committee on this issue. Clarification is currently being sought on the current position and when it will be appropriate to submit an update report to the Committee.
2. Ward Walkabouts	Information has been requested on the Ward Walkabouts and their findings. Information on them is currently being sought with a view to a report being submitted.
3.Child Protection Policies	Councillor Stokes has submitted a call-in on this issue which is being considered at this meeting.
4.West Wing	A comprehensive report on the future of the West Wing was considered by the Community, Leisure & Environment Scrutiny Panel in March setting out options for the future of the arts in Slough, including the question of the future of the West Wing. The site is also tied up with the football club proposals which are under consideration at the moment. In the circumstances it may be inappropriate to submit another report just yet as the matter has been scrutinised relatively recently and will be presumably coming back to Members at some point.
5. Parking issues, signage and Taxi rank outside Slough Library and Slough Museum	Further information is being sought from the individual who raised this matter to clarify their concerns. If appropriate, the matter will be referred to the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Panel.

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MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD

COUNCILLOR	08/06	02/07	03/09	15/10	19/11	14/01	04/02	25/02	15/04
Basharat	P	P*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coad	P	P	P						
Cryer	-	-	P*						
Davis	P	P	P						
A S Dhaliwal	P	P*	P*						
Mann	P	P	P						
Pabbi	-	-	Ap						
Pantelic	P	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Walsh	P	P*	P						

P = Present for whole meeting
 Ap = Apologies given

P* = Present for part of meeting
 Ab = Absent, no apologies given

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