

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 5th December, 2011.

Present:- Councillors Minhas (Chair), Dar, Plenty, Strutton, A S Wright, Malik and Morris

Non Voting Co-Opted Members present: Sandy Malik, Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents, Darren Morris, Customer Senate

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Buchanan, Carter, Munawar and Sohal

PART 1

20. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dar declared an interest in that he was a licensed Hackney Carriage Driver.

21. Minutes of the last meeting held on 24th October, 2011

Minutes of the last meeting held on 24th October, 2011

Matters Arising

Community Centres – Future Provision

It was noted that the map of sixty community centres requested at the previous meeting had not been received by Panel members and it was agreed that this would be brought to the attention of the Scrutiny Officer, Guy Fiegehen, who had been unable to attend the meeting.

Winter Preparations

It was noted that the A3 sized map of the location of salt bins requested at the previous meeting had not been received by Panel members and it was agreed that this would be brought to the attention of Guy Fiegehen, Interim Scrutiny Officer.

The minutes of the last meeting held on 24th October, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

22. Member Questions

It was noted that questions had been forwarded to the Interim Scrutiny Officer in advance of the meeting. The responses were not available as the Scrutiny Officer was not in attendance and it was therefore agreed that responses would be forwarded to Panel members at the earliest opportunity.

23. Synchronisation of Traffic Signals on the A4 (Between Three Tuns Crossroads and Huntercombe Roundabout)

Nick Healey, Network Management Team Leader, outlined a report and presentation to the Panel, providing an update on the first year of operation of the traffic signal 'SCOOT' regions along the section of the A4 between the Three Tuns crossroads and the Huntercombe roundabout.

The Panel noted that in the Autumn of 2010 the installation and commissioning of the SCOOT system had been completed and a number of positive results had been achieved. In particular there had been significant improvement to journey times on the A4 involving the sequential linking of green lights and it was now possible to travel the full length of the region without being stopped repeatedly by red lights. The Officer discussed a number of challenges which had been identified in the first year of operation of the system including the occasional longer delay for drivers waiting to access the A4 from side roads. It was highlighted that the A4 corridor had been kept under continual review during the last year and a number of improvements had been implemented including some experimental ones. A number of further improvements were discussed but these had not been developed to date.

The Officer advised that a new SCOOT scheme would be developed in the town centre for the Heath of Slough scheme with the potential for future links to the other roads.

The Panel was advised that the A4 corridor would be kept under continual review and would be subject to further improvements when resources and budgets allowed. It was estimated that the introduction of the SCOOT system had resulted in peak time saving of £500k per annum with additional savings being made off-peak and overnight.

In the ensuing debate members raised a number of comments and questions regarding the scheme, particularly around the adverse affects that the synchronisation of the A4 lights had on surrounding side roads. The Officer advised that there was a balance to be found between the success of the A4 route and the resulting affects on other minor roads, and it had been reported that drivers' overall journeys were less as a whole due to the shorter journey experience on the A4 itself. In response to further questions the Officer advised that the evidence reported on the reduction in journey times was factual and not anecdotal and that also the system had been shown to reduce air pollution. The Panel was reassured that if the server for the system crashed a full back up mode was available whilst the contractor would rebuild the system. The Officer highlighted that the option to close service roads at one end was not desirable as this would cause problems for vehicular access to refuse lorries, emergency services and other vehicles.

It was agreed that the presentation slides would be forwarded to Panel Members.

The Officer was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

24. Regulation of Distribution of Free Printed Matter

Mick Sims, Licensing Manager, outlined a report regarding the distribution of free printed matter which sought the Panel's view on proposals to introduce regulations.

The Panel was advised that at its meeting on 5th October 2011, the Licensing Committee considered a report requesting approval for a formal consultation to take place on proposals to implement regulations regarding the control of the distribution of free printed matter in designated areas. On that occasion the Committee had determined that it had insufficient information to reach a decision on this matter and had requested that the Neighbourhood and Community Services Scrutiny Panel scrutinise the issue. The Panel was asked to consider matters such as the benefits of introducing the policy, the impact on small businesses, how problem areas had been identified, how the policy would be enforced, and the legal implications of introducing a specific policy within areas of the borough. The Panel was also asked to consider what the appropriate fee should be and what time period the fee would cover.

Members were advised that the proposed areas to be regulated were Slough town centre, the Farnham Road area, and areas within the Chalvey and the Langley St Mary's Wards. The suggested consent would cover a period of 8 hours after which the applicant would need to reapply for each designated area and the nominal charge of £25 would be applied to each application for a consent. Additional permissions for other designated areas would also be charged at £25. The Officer discussed the consent limitations and the definition of free printed matter.

In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of concerns regarding the introduction of the scheme. In particular there were concerns about the affect the cost of applications would have on local businesses, and that not all of the four identified areas appeared to be problematic to Members. The Panel also questioned the current use of fixed penalty notices to combat litter problems and whether if enforcement was carried out, this would reduce the need for consent applications to distribute leaflets in the first place. Some Members accepted that there could be a need for the scheme to be introduced in the high street area in the town centre but this was not the majority view. The overriding concern of the Panel was that the introduction of such a scheme could adversely affect the ability of new businesses starting up as the charges for the distribution of leaflets would be an additional burden in difficult economic times. Members concluded that without the availability of firm evidence that the scheme was needed, it would not be appropriate to introduce the proposed regulations at this time.

Resolved: That the Panel recommends that the Licensing Committee does not endorse the proposal to implement regulations requiring the need to apply for consent to distribute free printed matter.

25. Housing Futures - Provision of Housing Services Update Report

Neil Aves, Assistant Director (AD), Housing, outlined a report providing an update following nine months of service delivery in the new housing structure, eighteen months after the service was brought back in house. The AD advised that tenants were beginning to recognise changes which had brought greater responsiveness and accountability and also discussed the initiatives deployed to continue to drive through quality service delivery. The Panel noted the update on accommodation, customer access, and other areas such as recruitment and the outcome of the consultation carried out with tenants and leaseholders.

The AD discussed the current position regarding the planning for the future exercise when all staff had been offered the opportunity to review their future employment options. It was not anticipated that many requests would be received from staff within Housing Management but the service would consider requests for voluntary redundancy and early retirement from existing staff members.

The Customer Senate representative in attendance, commented that the key information missing was relating to local standards and advised that the Housing Services had been given an amber light by the Senate. He commented if standards could not be evidenced then the Senate would place a red light on the Housing Service and work was ongoing with Officers in this area. The AD responded that there had not been sufficient time to provide this and out of forty two staff only eight were previous employees.

Members asked a number of questions in the ensuing debate particularly around leaseholders, staff morale, and the position regarding caretakers and their responsibilities. In relation to parking charges at the Centre the AD confirmed that the charge was favourable compared to the previous charge for parking at the Wexham Nursery site.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

26. Housing Service Customer Senate - Review of Estate Services

Darren Morris, the Customer Senate representative, introduced a report detailing the recent review of Estate Services which was undertaken by the Senate. The comprehensive review set out the purpose of the review undertaken, the strength and weaknesses of the service identified and a number of recommendations that the Senate resolved should be considered

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when the Housing Service progressed development of the review through Scrutiny and Cabinet. It was highlighted that any changes to the service that the Senate made should be put through a rigorous transparent engagement process with the service users so that they could influence the quality, costs and level of service they received. Recommendations made by the Senate included a condition survey for all individual block communal areas, a Slough standard similar to the Decent Homes standard, and the creation of a borough wide estate service user group to develop a set of excellent service standard. It was noted that the Senate had conducted benchmarking visits when members had visited Hillingdon Housing Services, and Raydian Housing Association at Longford Park.

Mr Morris highlighted that during the desktop review the Senate was of the opinion that the Housing complaint procedure was inadequate and he provided examples of failings. It was suggested that Officers needed to undertake more face to face with residents.

The AD advised that he was happy to receive the Senate's report and an update report on Housing Services would be provided later in the year. Mr Morris invited all Panel members to attend future meetings of the Senate.

The Panel thanked the Senate for providing a detailed comprehensive report and for the open invitation to future Senate meetings.

Resolved: That the report be noted and that a future update report be provided.

27. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information

None were received.

28. Forward Work Programme

The programme for 16th January 2012 was reviewed and confirmed as follows:

- Community and Wellbeing Restructure-removed from programme.
- 'Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England'-removed from programme.
- Library Services- confirmed (report to include: report on contract, performance of the service one year on, and strategy).
- Review of progress at the Chalvey Community Centre and plans for the Community Centre in Britwell.
- Community Engagement Strategy

The following item was added to un-programmed items:

- Housing Services (update report- date tbc)

29. Members Attendance Record

Resolved: That the report be noted.

30. Date of Next Meeting- 16th January, 2012

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 16th January, 2012.

It was agreed that the meeting would be held at The Chalvey Community Centre, Chalvey.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.10 pm)

Chair