

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 15th November, 2012.

Present: Councillors Minhas (Chair), Bal, Carter, Dar, O'Connor, Plenty, Sohal and Wright (Vice-Chair)

Non-Voting Co-Opted Members Present: Vivianne Royal (Customer Senate)

PART 1

70. Declarations of Interest

None.

71. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 September 2012

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 18 September 2012 were approved as a correct record.

72. Member Questions

None received.

73. Olympic and Paralympic Games Review

Andrew Stevens (Assistant Director, Community and Skills) and Gillian Ralphs (Assistant Director, Enforcement and Regulatory Services) presented a report to the Panel on how the implementation of preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games worked in practice, and outlined some of the legacy work that was being undertaken in the aftermath of the events.

The Panel noted the work that had been done to ensure that concerns regarding possible disruption to residents had not materialised, and that the Borough's infrastructure had handled the complex organisation well, with strong partnership working being the primary tool for achieving this. The Panel congratulated all those who had been involved.

Panel members questioned whether the initial budget of £81k had been met, and officers confirmed that there had not been an overspend; but in responding to a question regarding staff time, officers confirmed that there had been a big impact on staff time, but that this was not part of the project budget as it had already been covered through the usual staff budgets.

The Panel also discussed the problems that had been experienced by some taxi drivers, and the potential for promoting local businesses through the events.

The Panel then discussed the events that were being proposed as part of the legacy programme, and the need to ensure that partnerships such as the marshalling network be utilised as part of this.

Resolved – to note the report.

74. Beds in Sheds (Slough Sheds)

The Panel received a report from Ray Haslam (Housing Standards Manager), supported by Helen Scullard (Head of Strategic Housing) and Gillian Ralphs (Assistant Director, Enforcement and Regulatory Services) on how Slough Borough Council is working to address the prevalence of beds in sheds in the Borough.

The Panel noted the difficulties posed by the lack of legislation supporting enforcement action, but recognised that despite the difficulties there had been 40 cessations of illegal use of outbuildings as dwellings in the previous 12 months. The Panel stressed the need for a proactive approach to tackling this issue, to send a message to rogue landlords, as well as the need to be standing up for the Council's values.

The Panel discussed the reconvening of the Project Management Board to drive forward the council's enforcement actions against landlords renting out illegal outbuildings in this way, and the use of Energy Performance Certification and thermal imaging as a method of targeting them. The Panel commented that this could only be done through a properly formulated policy and cross-directorate working within the Council.

Resolved:

- 1) to note the report; and
- 2) to appoint Councillor O'Connor as the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel representative on the Project Management Board, following a request from officers.

75. Housing Performance

Helen Scullard (Head of Strategic Housing) presented the report detailing the recent restructuring of in-house Housing Services and current performance for the service.

The Panel received assurances that with the Service reaching a more stable position, the new structure was seen to be working well, providing higher standards of housing management at a lower cost through integrated working; however, officers recognised that quality did still vary depending on the officer involved, and that training had been put in place to build up experience and provide a consistent, high quality service.

The Panel also raised issues around the performance of housing in the collection of rent arrears, and concerns about the impact of the upcoming changes to housing benefits.

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Resolved – to note the report.

76. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – to note its current work programme.

77. Attendance Record

Resolved – that the Members attendance record be noted.

78. Date of Next Meeting - 10 January 2013

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10 January 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)