

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 4th September, 2014.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Coad, N Holledge, Malik, Mansoor, Shah and Sohal

Non-voting co-opted members Vivianne Royal (Slough Customer Senate)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Brooker and Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Wright

PART 1

10. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Malik and Shah declared their status as Council tenants.

11. Minutes of the last meeting held on 3 July 2014

Members wished to indicate their view that the minutes of 3 July 2014 did not reflect the robust nature of their questioning of Interserve. This related to minute 7 (Voids Contract Performance).

In addition, in this minute the policy on allocations is not currently being reviewed. It is also the responsibility of Hamid Khan (Head of Place Shaping) rather than Trevor Costello.

Resolved – That, subject to the comments above, the minutes of the meeting on 3 July 2014 be approved as a correct record.

12. Member Questions

No written questions were submitted by panel members before the meeting.

13. Neighbourhood Policing

Neighbourhood policing supported the theme of civic responsibility in the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, and Slough Borough Council (SBC) would offer relevant assistance. In particular, Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) and community focus groups (especially those relating to crime and disorder) would receive support. The picture of NAGs in Slough was mixed; whilst some were proactive and engaged, others had become inactive whilst some were now run as neighbourhood focus groups.

In addition, Thames Valley Police (TVP) had launched a review in 2013, which sought to investigate whether neighbourhood policing was fit for

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purpose. In spite the cuts, TVP had commitment to neighbourhood policing from the highest levels of management; despite the lower budget, frontline police presence had increased in the last two years. Instead savings had been generated by cuts to back office functions and the use of increased collaboration with other police forces. The review had the following priorities:

- Improving efficiency and effectiveness in preparation for further funding cuts.
- Effective communication and engagement.

The panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Ownership of NAGs was the responsibility of local communities. TVP would interact with NAGs once established and ensure that the best efforts were made to support their work; however, they needed to be independent of TVP and could not be established by them. Despite this, TVP requested details of any NAGs with which they were not engaging and would then work to rectify the situation. The Safer Slough Partnership was also to engage with NAGs, and issues raised by NAGs could be referred up to the relevant Slough sector where appropriate.
- Local publicity for NAGs and Have Your Say events needed improvement. Communications at the buildings hosting events or through bodies such as Tenants' and Residents' Groups could be one example of ensuring a raised public profile. TVP could work on raising the profile of community events, but would also appreciate support from SBC and Councillors in this matter.
- Information was being shared in the three Slough sectors (North, South and East) once it had been captured. Information which spanned more than one sector would then be referred to a Local Policing Area (LPA) meeting.
- NAGs were not a standardised body; their composition and operation could vary to reflect the local community and the most effective method for the area. Some found that using a system of delegated representatives with a limited membership was most suitable, whilst other NAGs held regular meetings that were open to all local residents.

(At this point in the meeting, Councillor Sohal left)

- Greater co-ordination between NAG Chairs (e.g. quarterly joint meetings) could improve their effectiveness. Equally, the establishment of an advisory point for NAGs (e.g. page on SBC website, dedicated email inbox) could also improve co-ordination. However, SBC also needed to ensure that the independence of NAGs remained intact, with its role being facilitation of their activities.
- The timescales for responses to 999 calls were immediate, within one hour and within 24 hours depending on the urgency of the situation. This was done by risk assessment, but TVP could not supply details as to whether or when this information would be communicated to the caller. This matter could be checked with 999 call centres.

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- Given the likely cuts to future budgets, the possibility of sharing resources (e.g. call centres) with the other emergencies would be explored if they were workable. Similar co-operation had already been occurring which should facilitate any new plans.
- The use of the word 'maintain' when referring to the future levels of crime (e.g. 'maintain the outcome rate for violence against the person') was questioned. TVP responded that this was a consequence of recent decisions not to impose specific percentages as targets, but that the aim would always be to improve crime prevention.

At this point, questioning was concluded to allow for discussion of other items, although some members wished their desire to continue noted.

Resolved – that SBC officers discuss options for future activity on NAGs, for later appraisal by the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

14. Waste Collections

SBC was responsible for waste collection, with Amey serving at present as the contractor. 250,000 bins were collected each month, with a total of 55,000 tons being generated in this time. The number of complaints received by Amey was used as a key indicator of the quality of the customer experience; 45 complaints had been received in 2012 / 13, whilst this had fallen to 38 in 2013 / 14.

The panel raised the following matters in discussion:

- A major concern was that bins were not being returned to their original positions. This was causing particular difficulties for elderly or disabled residents and also for those living in areas with industrial bins. In addition, it could also cause problems with cars accessing driveways. This was a particular issue with silver bins. However, access could complicate the matter and bins could not always be returned, although the issue was recognised by Amey as a concern.
- The use of complaints received as an indicator of customer satisfaction was also a concern; self-inspection and internal measurements of quality were preferable. Furthermore, complaints were not reflective of all dissatisfaction amongst local residents.
- The hours chosen for routes needed to be selected to avoid peak hours on major traffic routes. In addition, collections near schools needed to be scheduled with regards to the times when children and parents would be present in large numbers. However, schools had more flexible hours than previously, which complicated the situation, as did the fact that more than one road was usually affected.
- As Amey now had 12 years of experience, detailed site maps of the areas where collections were made were being compiled. This work would continue and be used by the provider under the next contract (due to start late 2017).

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- The washing of bins was not part of the present arrangement. This could be added, but would cause a significant rise in the cost of the service. Bins were classed as a fixed asset which were loaned to residents, and therefore it was their responsibility to clean them. Communal bins were the responsibility of landlords; however, very few Councils chose to maintain their bins.
- New technology (e.g. fuel monitoring devices, 360° cameras) would be investigated for cost efficiency and be included in the re-procurement process. In addition, supervisors would also monitor collections and compile reports on service levels.
- At present, there were no methods of redress for those who did not recycle waste. Technical officers were assessing the situation, with areas failing to meet required levels receiving educational information on the matter.
- Any renewal of Amey's contract would be based on benchmarking and performance data. A team would start evaluating the re-procurement process on 18 September 2014.
- The long term targets of 0.00001% for missed domestic residual waste bins and missed domestic recycling bins would be amended given the difficulty of measuring such low rates.

Resolved – that the following areas be addressed in the comments to Cabinet:

1. The return of bins to a point as close as possible to the place of collection, with the possibility of a measurement to be explored.
2. The starting time of collections; 7am would help avoid problems with congestion around rush hours and peaks in activity around schools, although the implications for 'vehicle reversing' alarms may need clarification.
3. The compilation of other indices of customer satisfaction beyond the use of complaints received by Amey.
4. The target levels of 0.00001% included in appendix 1.

15. Water Metering

Water meters were proposed as an effective method for reducing the bills of tenants and their usage of water (which was cut by an average of 12%). Therefore, SBC was intending to promote and improve the access of tenants to Thames Water (TW) metering for their properties.

The panel raised the following matters in discussion:

- There had been reports of instances where TW had claimed that Council tenants' property was part of a corporate account and therefore would not act over non-payment. As SBC was the contractor, it would chase and collect in these instances. However, some residents were finding payment difficult; collection could prove time and resource intensive in these cases. SBC were planning to share information with

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TW in an arrangement with an agreed protocol. SBC was not monitoring TW customer service but would continue to pressurise for service improvements.

- SBC would encourage tenants to take up the offer in cases where they would benefit from water metering. However, SBC could not enforce the matter.
- Whilst it was recorded that no tenants had been evicted over the matter of payment for water, there was no information on how many cases where it had been a significant factor in eviction.
- There were no secondary meter arrangements in place.

Resolved – that the Panel note the contents of the report.

16. Sheds With Beds

The project was now focusing on rogue landlords as a priority. The quality of service to tenants was being emphasised and it was intended that progress would accelerate over the coming months. This should be assisted by income being raised by the project, which was neutralising the cost of the associated project team.

Legislation on energy efficiency had changed with domestic properties now included. This had complicated matters, as had problems with the recruitment of sufficiently experienced inspection and assessment staff. The procurement scheme also ran to tight deadlines and specifications. The fact that a property was deemed to be owned after four years (and therefore permanent) had moved the project's focus away from identification and planning. The main questions emerging about the accommodation in question were as follows:

- Is it appropriate? If so, was it liable to Council Tax?
- Is it suitable for tenancy?

In cases where the accommodation served as reasonable accommodation, inspection and assessment would be used to monitor the issue. Landlords would also be clearly informed as to their responsibilities, and rents would be chased should they not be declared.

The panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Private owners could refuse SBC entry to property. However, SBC had means of redress by getting access with 24 hours notice. Furthermore warrants could be obtained where necessary. There was also an online reporting system which fed into SBC.
- If properties registered as business premises were to be rented out as accommodation, this change would require planning permission. However, resources would need to be prioritised on the matter as older properties were immune from prosecution. SBC would enforce in cases where it had the powers to do so.
- Council Tax for these properties could be backdated. Where this was the case, SBC would be responsible for enforcement.

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- The possibility of paying staff commission rates had been raised, but had experienced difficulties during the procurement phase of discussions.

Resolved – that the Panel note the contents of the report.

17. Forward Work Programme

The Chair circulated information regarding the Panel's areas of responsibility and asked members to consider it in raising items for future agendas. In addition, the Panel would receive the relevant forms for requesting future agenda items via email.

The Panel was also informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider Town Centre Car Parking on 11 September 2014. This could have an impact on the Panel's agenda for 29 October.

18. Attendance record

The attendance record was noted.

19. Date of Next Meeting - 29 October 2014

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 7.02 pm and closed at 9.18 pm)