

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 17th November, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bedi (from 7.20pm), N Holledge, Parmar, Sadiq (from 6.34pm until 8.20pm), A Sandhu and Usmani (until 9.20pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ajaib, Hussain, Morris, Munawar, Plenty, Sharif and Swindlehurst.

PART I

25. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

26. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 15 September 2016

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

27. Action Progress Report

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee regarding activity relating to the Action Progress report.

Resolved – That details of the Action Progress Report be noted.

28. Member Questions

A copy of the question received from Councillor Strutton, regarding new plans for non transfer of housing tenancies, and reply was tabled for the Committee's attention. Councillor Strutton expressed concern that information relating to the number of cases of succession and evictions was not available and informed the Committee that he had been assured regular reviews would be carried out. It was explained that the current housing management system did not record such information. The Interim Strategic Director, Regeneration, Housing and Resources stated that he would look into why regular reviews had not been conducted and report back to the Committee.

29. Call In: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

The Committee were reminded that a Call In had been received requesting that consideration be given relating to the Housing Revenue Accounts rents policy and Cabinet's decision at its meeting in October 2016 to approve it.

The Interim Strategic Director, Regeneration, Housing and Resources, Mike England informed Members of the rationale for the proposal to charge higher rents on new build properties. The proposal in the Business Plan was for rents

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to be at 80% of market rent or the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate, whichever was the lower. In most cases this was likely to be the LHA rate, which was around 70% to 75% of the market rent, depending on property size. This approach had been adopted to ensure that the homes would still be available to residents claiming Housing Benefit. In all other respects, including security of tenure and tenants' rights, the position of tenants remained the same as in any other council tenancy. It was noted that the proposal for immediate implementation of the higher policy derived from the fact that 23 new properties were due to be handed over to the Council before the end of March 2017. If a standard council rent was charged on these properties they would be subject to the Government's controls on existing rents and it would therefore not be possible subsequently to increase rent levels to the higher rates. It was explained that over the 30 year life of the Business Plan the additional rent income on these properties was significant and would be beneficial to the HRA.

It was brought to the Committee's attention that a number of factors had contributed to a change in policy including that the current position on the Housing Revenue Account was that the Council did not have a clear picture of either its income or its required expenditure over the life of the Plan and as a consequence did not know if the account is viable in the medium and long term. In this period of uncertainty, these new build properties represent the only significant source of additional income available to the Council and this income may be required to sustain investment in existing homes as well as to build new ones.

Members were informed that the reserves to fund the new build programme were a one off and if the Council charged higher rents on these new build homes it could fund the building of more new council homes. There is a trade-off between rents charged and the number of new homes which can be afforded. This is a position facing all local authorities now in a situation there is now no national subsidy available for affordable rented housing. Mr England also outlined the Government's intention to introduce new Pay to Stay arrangements from April 2017. This would result in households with a gross income of more than £31,000 paying more rent, with the additional income paid back to the Government. Under this new policy, some existing tenants will pay more in their current homes and some may pay more in the newly-built homes. If the higher rent structure is adopted on the new homes, the extra rent would be retained in Slough rather than going back to the Government.

Mr England stated that prior to any formal consideration of the Call In there had been further developments relating to the implementation of the higher rent policy. Legal issues surrounding the lettings policy on the new properties had meant that implementation had been delayed and it was anticipated that letting of these properties would not now take place until early 2017.

Councillor Swindlehurst, a signatory to the Call In, addressed the Committee outlining the reasons why a Call In had been submitted. It was argued that the manner in which the decision had been taken conflicted with the Council's

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requirements for transparency, due notification and scrutiny when making such service changes. It was requested that the matter be deferred and considered as part of the complete review of the HRA Business Plan in March 2017. The possibility of using Development Initiative Slough Housing (DISH) to take the properties was raised. It was noted that the rules regarding the use of Right To Buy receipts were likely to be outside the remit of DISH, although an appraisal would be made to see if this was possible.

Councillors Morris and Plenty also addressed the Committee under Rule 30. Concerns relating to a lack of social housing in the Borough and under utilisation of certain properties were raised. Charging to the General Housing Fund and the importance of accurate record keeping were also highlighted. The meeting was informed that the issues raised could be examined as part of the budget process and review.

Resolved - That consideration of the Call-In be deferred to the 12 January 2017 meeting.

30. Performance and Financial Management Report Quarter 2 - Verbal Update

The Interim Assistant Director, Finance and Audit, Mr Fitzgerald, provided the Committee with a verbal update on the Financial Budget Monitoring. A £1.6 million revenue overspend was projected which was primarily due to existing pressures in Adult Social Care and under performance in income generated by the Assets Policy. There had been a significant underspend in the capital expenditure and this was due to be reported to a meeting of the Executive in December 2016. It was noted that the revenue budget overspend was not unique to Slough and that there were a number of local authorities in a similar financial position.

The Chair expressed his disappointment that a written report had not been submitted, especially given that Members had requested at the previous meeting that the reporting format be revised to ensure that information was presented in a more user friendly manner. Mr Fitzgerald stated that a Working Group had been established, who were in the process of updating the report format to ensure that the balanced scorecard was accessible and presented in a user friendly format and that the key elements within the report were linked to the five year Plan Outcomes. It was anticipated that the revised report format would be presented to the January 2017 committee meeting.

Resolved – That the verbal financial management Q2 update be noted.

31. Adult Social Care Transformation

Mr Sinclair, Assistant Director Adult Social Care, delivered a comprehensive presentation regarding the Adult Social Care Transformation (ASCT) Programme.

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Members were reminded that the ASCT Programme was a four year programme which began in 2015/16. The programme would need to manage an increase in user demand amidst reduced budgets. £7.9m efficiencies would need to be delivered across the four year programme.

An Adult Social Care Strategy had been developed to deliver new ways of working and deliver savings. The core principles of the strategy were outlined as

- Prevent and delay the need for social care services by good information and advice, prevention, reablement, asset based approaches and building community capacity
- Avoid people being in crisis
- Support to carers to continue caring
- Support people to live at home and reduce number of people living in care homes
- Support people to manage their own care and support through direct payments and technology
- Working in partnership with the NHS to deliver integrated services
- Improving quality of local services
- Developing our workforce

Details of the efficiency savings 2014-19 were highlighted. It was noted that all savings were on target to being delivered during the period of the programme. Members queried as to why there was an overspend even though savings were being achieved. It was explained that even though there were less people in long term care there had been an increase in the number of people being supported by one off services. A greater number of people were being supported at home, especially those with a learning disability and/or mental health problem. It was noted that 74% of Councils were predicting an overspend in 2016/17.

A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion:

- *What level of engagement had been undertaken with service users regarding the development of the strategy.* Members were informed that consultation had taken place with service users and voluntary sector agencies who had contributed to the development of the strategy.
- *Whether individuals were staying in the town for longer or moving away.* Mr Sinclair explained that recent population profile statistics had remained static over the past five years, indicating that many people were choosing to remain in the local area.
- *Challenges in recruiting social workers.* The Committee were informed that a consultation on the restructure of the future of the service was due to begin December 2016. Although the service currently relied on a number of agency staff, Mr Sinclair was confident that positions would be appointed to on a permanent basis following the re-structure.
- *Liaison with colleagues regarding development of the Council's new Housing Strategy.* Input to the development of the Housing Strategy

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was vital in ensuring individuals were supported in allowing them to remain in their homes for as long as possible. It was noted that improvements would also be made to the current sheltered housing stock and plans were in progress for the development of extra care housing.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mr Sinclair for his presentation and placed on record their appreciation for the achievements made by the department during a challenging period.

Resolved – That details of the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme be noted.

32. Housing Issues - Future Approach to Scrutiny

The Interim Director, Housing, Resources and Regeneration outlined the proposed allocation of scrutiny responsibilities to be adopted to examine the Housing Strategy. It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting be arranged for December 2016 to consider the draft Housing Strategy and Homelessness.

Resolved –

- a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee retains the responsibility for scrutinising the Housing Strategy and for receiving 6-monthly monitoring reports on progress against the Action Plan within the Housing Strategy.
- b) That the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel assumes responsibility for scrutinising all other Housing matters, including performance and operational issues.
- c) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider holding a special meeting in December 2016 or January 2017 to consider the draft Housing Strategy.
- d) That the Committee note the indicative schedule of Housing items already suggested for consideration by the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel over the next year, as discussed in paragraphs 5.8 and 5.9 of this report.

33. Local Plan 2016-2036: Issues and Options Consultation

The Planning Policy Lead Officer, Mr Stimpson, reminded the Committee that the Government required all Local Authorities to have an up to date Local Plan that sets out how many homes they would provide and its approach to permitting new development.

The Issues and Options document outlined what the Council considered to be the key issues and drivers of change that the Review of the Local Plan would

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address and some Spatial Options which highlighted where development could take place in the future. The document included a Vision for Slough, 14 objectives and an outline of what future policies could be in order to implement the strategy in the emerging plan. A range of sites had been identified for housing development within Slough including expansion of Langley Centre (to include land around the railway station), creation of new residential Neighbourhood on the Akzo Nobel and National Grid sites west of the Uxbridge Road, regeneration of the Canal Basin area, New Cippenham Central Strip and Chalvey regeneration. Development in South Bucks and Windsor and Maidenhead were also viable options.

Whilst welcoming the options being proposed Members enquired about the impact the developments would have on both the transport and education infra-structure in the town. Mr Stimpson stated that it was recognised that the scale of growth being proposed would add to the congestion and if not properly controlled have an impact upon the quality of the environment. It was noted that the plan would need to address mitigating these affects as far as possible, including introduction of policies which restricted the use of private cars to encourage more people to use public transport. The Committee were informed that the consultation process relating to a revised transport strategy was due to begin shortly. It was noted that investment had been made to the education infrastructure with the opening of two new secondary schools and a third one planned for the near future.

A Member questioned what measures were being taken to halt the decline of the town centre as a shopping centre. It was announced that Abu-Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) had completed a £130 million purchase of the Queensmere and Observatory Shopping centres. The redevelopment would bring a mix of retail, leisure and high quality residential living to the centre of Slough.

It was anticipated that the recent announcement of Heathrow expansion, would create over seventy thousand jobs for the region and whilst the Borough would lose business premises, it was anticipated that there would be no loss of any residential premises.

Resolved – That details of the Local Plan (2016-2036) issue and Options Consultation Document be noted.

34. Forward Work Programme

Details of the Committee's Forward Work Programme were considered and it was agreed that the Forward Work Programme be updated as

Resolved:

Special December 2016 Meeting

- Draft Housing Strategy
- Homelessness

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12 January 2017

- Call In – Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Performance and Financial Report

9 March 2017

- Slough Urban Renewal
- Town Centre
- Local Economy

35. Members Attendance Record 2016/17

Resolved – That details of the Members Attendance Record be noted.

36. Date of Next Meeting - 12 January 2017

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as 12 January 2017.

It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting would be arranged in December 2016 to consider the Housing Strategy and Homelessness.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.29 pm)