

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 26th June, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Anderson, Davis, Kelly, Mann, Plenty, Swindlehurst and Wright

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Matloob and Nazir

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor N Holledge and Rasib

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were given in relation to the meeting's agenda.

2. Election of Chair for 2017 - 18

Cllr Davis nominated Cllr Plenty as Chair for the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Swindlehurst.

Resolved: that Cllr Plenty be elected to the position of Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel unanimously for the Municipal Year 2017 – 18.

(At this point, Cllr Plenty took the Chair).

3. Election of Vice Chair for 2017 - 18

Cllr Wright nominated Cllr Kelly as Vice Chair for the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Kelly.

Resolved: that Cllr Kelly be elected to the position of Vice Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel unanimously for the Municipal Year 2017 – 18.

4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 4th April 2017

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2017 be approved as an accurate record.

5. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the update on the progress made on actions be noted.

6. Member Questions

The answers received to the members' questions were circulated to the Panel.

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The road safety budget was part of the overall transport budget. In specific terms, this was approximately £200,000 out of a budget of £6 – 7 million. None of this was ring-fenced after the Department for Transport removed this. The money had been spent on items such as Vehicle Actuated Signs (VASs), localised traffic calming measures such as bollards and traffic signal junctions. These were all included in revenue expenditure.

In relation to housing, Slough Borough Council (SBC) confirmed that its present focus was on its own assets as opposed to inspecting hotels and other such buildings for fire safety. SBC would act on Government guidance regarding the private sector once it was provided. SBC had also been working with the Fire Service, and was sharing its information on planning applications to compile a picture of the current situation.

4 tenants remained in the Tower and Ashbourne. SBC was working to acquire these tenancies so that the regeneration of the area could be completed. Meanwhile, support was being offered to Radian Housing although ultimate responsibility for safety lay with them.

The Grenfell disaster had led to the establishment of a Task Force, which was presently meeting at least once per week. This was currently discussing housing disposals, storage policy, fire safety inspections and cleanliness. Cladding was also being analysed; this involved not only evaluation of the materials, but also the manner in which they were installed.

In terms of immediate findings, SBC confirmed that none of its blocks used the cladding material present at Grenfell Tower. In addition, the insulation was glued to the wall then rendered, ensuring that no gap existed for oxygen to fuel any fire. However, SBC was committed to checking the quality of this insulation. In the days prior to the meeting, Broom and Poplar had been the focus of attention. Letters had been written to residents and 24 hour security were present on site to provide protection. An independent contractor was reviewing safety and conducting reports where an issue had been identified. SBC was also investigating the option of installing sprinkler systems. SBC would also be meeting with residents' representatives in June 2017.

Samples of cladding had not yet been sent by SBC to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). DCLG had sent out a questionnaire, and the responses to this were the basis on which local authorities had decided whether to send samples or not. However, SBC was testing the materials itself and would send over samples when appropriate. So far, the samples requested were Aluminium Composite Materials (ACMs), although these were not all the same as the material used in Grenfell Tower. SBC was also aware that factors beyond cladding were potentially involved in the Grenfell disaster, and also Camden's recent decision to evacuate its tenants. SBC was also aware that issues which were not present at Grenfell Tower could present fire safety issues; SBC would be revisiting its policies across all areas on the matter. However, the Building Control Team had identified compartmentalisation as crucial in preventing the rapid spread of

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fire. Communications with local residents were regular, and based on standard wording issued by the Fire Service.

The recent stock condition survey had provided a significant bank of information, although it was not sufficiently intrusive to provide confirmation that every detail of housing was secure. SBC was part of a Mutual Aid Agreement, including all of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. As a result, any emergency response should meet the needs of those affected. All relevant staff had also been trained in responding to emergencies.

Doors were inspected as part of any fire risk inspection. Leases for council tenants also restricted the rights of residents to modify their properties too greatly; Broom and Poplar had been inspected just before the Grenfell disaster, with the other 4 properties now underway. Fire risk inspections were also independent from SBC and undertaken every 2 years; the Fire Service also conducted ad hoc inspections in between time.

The response provided with regards to Prevent was noted.

Resolved: That an item on the progress of fire safety work be added to the agenda for 2nd November 2017.

7. Safer Slough Partnership - Update

The Panel received a statement from Cllr Bains, in his position as the Councillor who proposed the original motion to Council on 26th June 2016. This signalled his approval of the recommendations in the report, with particular reference to the Parks and Open Spaces Task & Finish Group. In future, he requested that the progress being made should be communicated more clearly to the local public.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- 2/3rds of sexual offences and rapes took place in the home; whilst such incidents in public spaces were the cause of the motion to Council, they were a small percentage of the overall figure. However, the current trend was that the number of offences was being reduced.
- The Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) had focused on violence against the person and sexual offences. Whilst the figures were decreasing, SSP was committed to measures to provide long-term mitigation on the matter (e.g. work in schools). However, SSP were encouraged that the rate of decline in sexual offences had been greater than national averages. Overall, Slough was in its best position on the matter since 2013.
- The Violence Against Women and Girls group also covered acts against men and boys.
- Slough Youth Parliament was part of SSP and feeding into its strategy.
- Given the need to change perceptions of local parks, it would require time to improve their reputation with the local public. In addition, discussion on the matter with clear references to sexual violence were

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likely to be counter productive. As a result, initiatives such as 'Love Parks' would emphasise positive messages.

Resolved:

1. That the Panel resolve that the activity outlined in this report is an adequate and appropriate response to the Council motion of 26th July 2016.
2. That the Panel reflect this to the next meeting of full Council as appropriate.
3. That the matter be added to the agenda for the first meeting of the 2018 – 19 Municipal Year.

8. Vehicle Actuated Signs

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- SBC was aware of the length of time since undertakings had been given on the deployment of Vehicle Actuated Signs (VAS). SBC had investigated the option making efficiencies through the contract framework and the use of intelligent contract systems. However, its attempt to work with other local authorities to speed up the process had led to a situation in which SBC was hamstrung by working alongside authorities across the whole of South East England. These complications were added to by a legal challenge submitted by one of SBC's contractors.
- During the summer of 2017, SBC would become able to buy VASs directly from the company. SBC also had contracts with Swarco and Siemens.
- Using the current stock on a 6 monthly rotational basis, it would take a decade to work through the list of sites identified for VASs. As a result, SBC was using speed guns to investigate issues and identify the priority areas for their deployment. Sites which would not require such traffic calming measures would be deleted from the list.
- Each move took around an hour to an hour and a half to implement and cost £700. At present, the lack of revenue meant that these were done on a 6 monthly basis rather than quarterly. However, discussions with the Assistant Director for Finance and Audit had been held regarding the use of 'Ward Walkabout' money. In general, SBC was investigating ways to make the policy more cost effective.
- Batteries were now safer and did not require specialist handling, which should make the process easier to conduct.
- The '85th percentile speed' measure referred to in the report was standard Department for Transport policy.
- Where the information was held, the members of the public who had made the original request for VASs would be informed of the decision made.
- VASs were not sufficient to ensure road safety; whilst some road users would be deterred by their warnings, others would need intervention to desist.

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- A capital bid would be presented by Transport in June 2017; VASs would be part of this, alongside other measures such as 20mph zones. Should the revenue budget allow for efficiencies in other areas, SBC would seek to procure VASs.
- Whilst the Langley Road VASs was located near temporary traffic lights, it had detected some very high speeds. However, the issues with its location were recognised.

Resolved: That a list of sites identified for the deployment of VASs be sent to all Councillors, with information on the use of ward money to be circulated with the form.

9. 5 Year Plan: Outcome 4 (Access to Good Quality Homes)

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The private rented sector was currently an area of much activity. Lower quality landlords needed action taken against them, with prosecutions to be taken as appropriate. In addition, the innovations currently being undertaken in London Boroughs could prove useful sources of ideas for SBC.
- SBC would inform members as to the partnership arrangement with the Local Asset Backed Vehicle and their compliance with SBC's planning policy.
- Members also raised concerns with the tenability of the current position regarding houses in multiple occupation.

Resolved: That the Panel add the following Outcome 4 priorities to their future agendas:

- 7th September 2017: Review our allocations policy
- 2nd November 2017: Robust regulation of the private rented sector
- 17th January 2017: Make best use of existing public sector housing stock

10. Neighbourhood and Housing Scrutiny Overview Indicators

The Panel made the following points in discussion:

- Despite the attempts made to remove unmanageable sites from SBC's stock, some of the sites retained had issues which made their deployment difficult (e.g. not wide enough for modern vehicles). As a result, an indicator on the percentage of SBC garages being let out may be a more useful measure on performance.
- At present, the re-let time on voids could register at 60 – 70 days. This had been a long term issue; members wished to receive a report by exception providing greater detail on the matter.

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- The increase in the £20 de minimis level for write offs was a proposal rather than a decision which had been enacted.
- The stage 3 complaint related to maladministration of a case where SBC had discharged their responsibility via the private sector (which was not part of the complaint). This had been a staffing issue, which was now resolved permanently.
- Stage 2 complaints had risen. Members would be informed as to the reasons for this.

Resolved:

1. That the Panel approve changes to Scrutiny Indicator 7 (average rent cost)
2. That the Panel approve the removal of the following indicators:
 - Indicator 8: Total rent cost
 - Indicator 38: Breakdown of RAG ratings for inspected garages
 - Indicator 45: Number of fixed penalty notices
 - Indicator 46: Percent of income rate against payments of fixed penalty notices
3. That the Panel recommend that a Scrutiny Indicator on the percentage of garages held by SBC currently being let be added to the list of indicators.
4. That a report by exception on voids be added to the agenda for 2nd November 2017.

11. Slough Local Air Quality and Low Emissions Strategy

Resolved: That the item be deferred to the meeting on 7th September 2017.

12. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: That, in addition to the changes to the work programme noted in the previous minutes, the following items be added:

- 17th January 2017: Emergency plan
- 17th January 2017: Effectiveness of Prevent

13. Date of Next Meeting - 7th September 2017

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 9.12 pm)