

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 25th June, 2018.

Present:- Councillors N Holledge, S Parmar, Plenty, Rasib, Sabah, A Sandhu, Shah and Wright

Non-Voting Co-Opted Members Trevor Pollard (Residents Board Panel)
Morris Sless (Residents Board Panel)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Kelly

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Shah declared her tenancy of a house owned by Slough Borough Council (SBC).

2. Election of Chair for 2018 - 19

Cllr Shah nominated Cllr Plenty as Chair for the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Rasib.

Resolved: That Cllr Plenty be elected to the position of Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel unanimously for the Municipal Year 2018 – 19.

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

3. Election of Vice Chair for 2018 - 19

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

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 2018 – 19.

4. Proposed New Co-opted Member - Residents Board Panel

This item was withdrawn.

5. Minutes of the last meeting held on 4th April 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

6. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the action progress report be noted.

7. Member Questions

Members discussed the response regarding a tunnel or bridge being provided to keep Market Lane open. The issues raised included the consultation process with Network Rail, whether any modelling of the impact on journey times would be undertaken and the need for a permanent solution. As a result, the Panel requested that an agenda item be added to the work programme; for this, a representative from Network Rail would be required.

Resolved: That an agenda item on Market Lane be added to the work programme for 2018 – 19.

8. Safer Slough Partnership

The Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) brought a varied group of relevant agencies together to focus on specific areas (e.g. vulnerability, 'hidden harms') that were outside of their usual business but central to their aims. This allowed for an increased level of joint focus and the pooling of capacity. In addition, governance was vital for SSP's work, especially in terms of holding each other to account and sharing information.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The 'complex and chaotic' category included very diverse groups; some were more prone to remaining in this situation for long periods than others. For example, whilst those assigned to this category via the Violence Multi-Agency Panel were clearly defined through a range of criteria, other groups (e.g. anti-social behaviour in Slough town centre) may be subject to more diverse circumstances.
- This category was also working with mental and public health as appropriate to consult on care needs. There were clearly established protocols for information sharing on this matter.
- Different approaches in terms of police visibility could be developed for different geographical areas, depending on the local issues involved. The Three Sector Tasking brought police groups together and allowed Councillors to feed their knowledge and views into the process. Contact details for these groups would be circulated to members via the Communications Team.
- Communications between agencies were proving a major element in understanding the challenges at the local level. Processes were now being developed so that Councillors could relay their messages to the key agencies through the Three Sector Tasking system.
- Hospitals and Accident & Emergency units have built a picture of risk analysis with regards to modern slavery; A & E had undertaken a project with Domestic Abuse Services on the matter. As a result of this,

police were receiving a far greater number of requests for support regarding potential cases.

- Councillors were also reminded that SSP could be a suitable candidate for their personally allocated funding.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. Update on Garages Strategy

The strategy had been discussed by the Panel since late 2015 and was now seeing physical progress. 45 potential sites for new homes had been identified, with modular homes to be tested for their suitability. Further sites were having informal investigations undertaken into their viability, with future work being co-ordinated with the Housing Service.

In addition to this, other sites were being identified as in need of renovation to continue to operate as garages. A priority for these would be security to ensure that issues such as fly tipping, anti-social behaviour and unauthorised activity were prevented. In total, 7 such sites would be completed in July 2018 with a further 6 to commence work later that summer. There were also plans to review the licence agreement with garage owners and work with the National Fraud Initiative to resolve any problems with improper use.

Garage occupancy had risen to 43%; the waiting list had also diminished. A range of parking bay solutions were also being analysed to ensure that any use of these would not cause difficulty by creating 'hot spots' where road users were inconvenienced or by being located too far away from the homes of those using them. There would also be a need to ensure that rents were set at an appropriate level. As a result, it would be proposed to Cabinet that an enhanced charge of £7 per week (as opposed to the standard £3.46) would be requested for secure parking. This would rise to £10.20 for owner-occupiers and tenants or leaseholders.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The first wave of sites prioritised for redevelopment had been selected on the basis of unwanted behaviour observed by a range of agencies.
- Proposals were being developed on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with Community Project teams; tailored responses were therefore on offer.
- The proposals for houses were at an early stage; planning issues, site density and other matters were awaiting discussion. As a result, the numbers of new homes in the report were highly provisional. Equally, the work (once started) could take 3 – 5 years and would be part of a gradual programme rather than one where all work commenced simultaneously.
- In cases where there was no demand for garages and the site was also not suitable for new homes, alternative uses or disposal would be looked at as options.

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- Planning were providing clear advice on the needs of local residents and the impact of this on garages (e.g. multi-car households).
 - The Private Sector Enforcement Team would respond to cases where garages where misuse was causing problems (e.g. hygiene).
 - The strategy had also used census data to predict the impact of any changes (e.g. there was a greater oversupply of cars compared to garages). The impact on traffic patterns would also be analysed as the work progressed.
 - Hot spots (e.g. school drop off areas) were also part of the calculations.
 - On street parking was the responsibility of Neighbourhood Services.
- (At this point, Cllr Wright left the meeting)

- Lighting would be provided for all sites; this would be solar powered and would not be intrusive for neighbouring properties. The units had already been purchased at a cost of £3,000 – 4,000 per column.

Resolved: That the Panel recommend the application of the enhanced parking charge for spaces in the redeveloped, access-controlled car parking spaces.

10. Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Overview Indicators

As requested, the report focused on performance regarding voids. It was also proposed that reporting should alternate between Neighbourhoods and Housing, with each reporting twice per year.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Under the Interserve contract, the average re-let time for voids had been very high. It had been reduced, but remained above the intended level. RSM Risk Assessment Services had conducted a voids audit, which members requested.
- However, legacy issues were not the only issue involved with current performance on voids. The other variables involved (e.g. current scope of voids work, performance in less severe voids as against properties in a less desirable state) were being assessed, with resources to be reallocated accordingly.
- There was also a Voids Sub Group being put in place to ensure that correct governance was in place.
- Other new approaches to voids would be taken. New processes would be developed to investigate void properties seen as having redevelopment potential, whilst reassigning homes as temporary accommodation would also become possible. The Void Management Policy was intended to be a living, amendable document.
- In addition, the final stages of the Interserve contract had seen some deterioration of standards. Some voids noted as 'completed' had not been to the standards desired by Osbornes (OPSL) and this had been factored into the final account presented by Interserve.

- Whilst the number of complaints had risen, much of this was the result of recent campaigns. Since the compilation of the scrutiny overview indicators, this had declined back to previous levels.
- Recharging had always been a policy; however, it had not been implemented consistently. OPSL would repair fittings in some cases, but cases would be appraised individually. OPSL also had a defects policy which operated for the first year of a new tenancy; they would also check with tenants during this period to ensure that all issues had been resolved in a void property. OPSL had a list of questions it could assess to see if a tenant was vulnerable and should not be recharged; however, it was reasonable to expect some responsibility on the part of tenants.
- The final picture of Interserve's legacy was incomplete due to issues with the extractability of some of the data concerned.
- OPSL did map the statistics in the report; however, it would not be appropriate to publish these in the agenda papers as it would complicate the overview. Instead, such ward-by-ward statistics could be shared with members outside of meetings.
- Call handlers had access to a system which automatically flagged key questions to ask depending on the status of the caller. This assisted with diagnosing the issues involved and the correct actions to take.
- In communal blocks, a variety of sources (e.g. CCTV, intelligence) was used to trace the source of any problems arising.

Resolved:

1. That the RSM voids audit be shared with the Panel.
2. That ward-by-ward performance statistics be shared with the Panel.
3. That subsequent reports from Neighbourhood and Housing Service alternate, with each reporting twice per year.

11. Rechargeable Repairs Policy

The new policy was designed to help with the voids process and working alongside those vacating premises. It would also provide a clear level of expectation as to what OPSL would be receiving at the point keys were handed over. A clear series of questions and diagnostics had also been devised to assess the level of repair work required at a property. Exemptions were available for those over 65 with medical conditions affecting their physical environment and victims of anti-social behaviour or other external factors.

The policy reinforced the value of the property handed over to tenants and the standards that could be expected upon its return. As well as encouraging tenant responsibility, SBC was not in a position to subsidise all degradation of their housing stock.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- At present, insurance costs were rising with the number of claims being an important factor. Regular property inspections were undertaken as

an attempt to mitigate this, although SBC's influence over insurance levels was extremely limited. The tenants' insurance scheme was a low cost weekly one, with leaseholders required to have contents insurance. The contract was tendered in an open manner and was retendered periodically.

- Recharges were also being integrated into a more holistic overview of tenancy. Previously 2 separate systems had been part of arrangements; now Capita were being charged with administering all assets to help identify any patterns arising (e.g. anti-social behaviour, damage, repairs). Where a number of concerns were identified intervention would take place. A flexible tenancy scheme also allowed OPSL to review relevant cases more frequently.
- Collection rates had historically been below targets; as well as the policy itself, OPSL was looking to create a culture of responsibility to counter this and create a more sustainable set up.
- Recovery rates were below average in pre-void extensions; however, OPSL did maintain a record of any debts and used these in future checks.
- Given the above, the new system should generate more income than before. It was also not a dedicated service, and as such did not require any large, discrete budget.
- A series of inspections was conducted in addition to those undertaken at the time a property became void, including:
 - Periodic tenancy audits
 - Reporting by officers during repair work
 - Reporting on tenants who never contact OPSL (as in some of these cases, they may be failing to report real needs)
- Ultimate responsibility in most cases lay with leaseholders; OPSL only shared this in cases of structural problems.
- Tenants were at liberty to hire private services to undertake repairs if they were not satisfied with OPSL's offer. A commercial service was being developed by SBC to help tenants and maximise the Council's resources.
- Some members questioned whether the new policy would make residents less willing to report issues. Equally, it was asked if the policy could worsen the situation those involved with Universal Credit could find themselves in. In response, the Panel were informed that a period would be allowed in which arrangements for payment could be made; however, the work would need to be completed to maintain the value of the housing stock. In addition, the Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements contract should reduce the costs of the service to tenants as well as allowing for payment in instalments. The impact of the policy would also be monitored as it progressed; nevertheless, the responsibilities of those using the house would continue to be emphasised.

Resolved: That the report and updated Policy Statement be noted.

12. Cycle Hubs

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The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The issue of transport, and trying to influence people to use alternatives to cars, was a major one for Slough. However, the levels of usage of the Cycle Hub and Cycle Hire schemes were continuing to be a concern for the Panel.
- Given the information present in the report, the Panel questioned the viability of the service and sought a resolution as to whether more would be done to bolster its performance. At present, it was doubtful that it could continue for any considerable period of time.
- As a result, the Panel would refer the matter to Cabinet for a view on the viability of the service.

Resolved: That the Panel refer the matter to Cabinet to make a decision on the long term viability of the Cycle Hubs scheme.

13. Bulky Waste Collection Service

Resolved:

1. That the Panel recommend the proposed changes for Bulk Waste Collection.
2. That the Panel recommend that online payment systems be available for the Bulk Waste Collection service.

14. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: That the following additions be made to the Forward Work Programme:

- 6th September 2018: Five Year Plan Outcome 4
- 1st November 2018: DISH
- 15th January 2019: Neighbourhood Performance
- 4th April 2019: Housing Performance

15. Date of Next Meeting - 6th September 2018

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.37 pm and closed at 8.55 pm)