

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 24th October, 2011.

Present:- Councillors Minhas (Chair), Buchanan, Dar, Plenty, Sohal, Strutton and A S Wright (Vice-Chair)

Apologies:- Councillor Carter and Munawar
Darren Morris (Customer Senate)

Non Voting Co-Opted Members present: Sandy Malik, Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents

10. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

11. Minutes of the last meeting held on 15th September 2011

The minutes of the last meeting held on 15th September 2011 were approved as a correct record.

12. Member Questions

Four questions had been submitted by members. Andrew Stevens, Assistant Director Culture and Skills provided responses confirming that eight user groups were accessing facilities at Rochfords Gardens, seven groups that had been successfully relocated (with discussions ongoing with the eighth group). Negotiations were also ongoing regarding assisting one group with managing hardship as a result of higher charges levied elsewhere.

13. Prostitution - Current Challenges and Future Actions

The Chair welcomed Louise Asby, Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Manager who presented an updated paper on the challenges posed by prostitution and the work being carried out by the Community safety partnership to address this. The Chair also welcomed Chief Inspector Jim Reeves, Deputy Borough Commander.

The item generated a number of member questions. Officers were asked what work would be carried out to ensure that if successfully tackled in Chalvey, the problem would not be displaced into another areas of the town. Questions were also asked on the use of ASB orders, why prostitution was such an endemic issue in Slough, whether a dedicated service could be established to improve reporting levels and the importance of tackling kerb crawlers.

The officer confirmed that due attention would be paid in ensuring that the problem is eradicated rather than displaced. The last time it had been a problem in Baylis and Stoke – the police successfully removed the problem and the issue in Chalvey today was not a continuation of the earlier Baylis problem. Responding to the issue of using Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

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orders, the officer stated that this was still a policy that was being actively considered. The issue today was however a changed legislative landscape which meant it harder (although not impossible) to use and impose ASB. To improve the changes of deploying ASBOs successfully there was now closer cooperation with Ealing and the use of 'loitering' as a means of removing girls from the street. The preferred option would be to both remove and deport where necessary to stop the problem from emerging elsewhere. Chief Inspector Reeves confirmed that the characteristics of Slough given its proximity to the airport, good transport links, cheaper housing etc all meant that Slough was a popular destination. However further research on what attracts both prostitutes and kerb crawlers to Slough needed to be carried out. Responding to the proposed suggestion of having a dedicated line – it was argued that this may cause more confusion given the numbers already available.

Members thanked Officers for the updated and comprehensive update and requested that an update on the issue and in particular progress made in implementing the new Police Strategy to tackle Prostitution be provided for the March meeting.

Resolved:-

That a further report be brought back to the Panel in March 2012

14. Community Centres Future Provision

The Chair welcomed Andrew Stevens, Assistant Director Culture and Skills, and John Rice, Assistant Director Environment and Regeneration, who presented a paper on the future provision of community centres in Slough.

A number of questions were raised. These included questions on the choice of locations for the four community hubs, further clarity about the future of particular centres including Horsemoor Green Langley and Haymill, the broad timeframe within which decisions will be resolved and the future of Orchard Youth Club.

Officers confirmed that the choice of the four locations had been a political decision and not one that was unilaterally made by Officers. The rationale remained sound however and followed both the need to satisfy existing need and meet wider regeneration goals. Further clarity was provided regarding the future of both Horsemoor Green and Haymill. In terms of the former, Officers confirmed that discussions were ongoing for the facility to be maintained but not in the ownership of the Council. If intended plans came into fruition, there would be a distinct possibility that the venue would be retained for the use of the community. In terms of Haymill, this had a number of unresolved questions. All the options were being considered at the moment. However a key issue to resolve was the future of the LABV programme. Decisions should be resolved within eighteen months. Regarding the future of Orchard Youth Club, officers confirmed that this site had been designated as a category D – one that was surplus to requirements. Some negotiations were ongoing with

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the Stoke Poges Lane Mosque regarding the sale of part of the site for the use of car park facilities. The remainder of the site was still subject to a final decision. Part of the complex was recently given over as a 12 month lease to a local community group however the future intention was still one of eventual disposal.

Comments were invited from Members in attendance. The Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal confirmed that the choice of the four hubs had been driven by concerns about both deprivation but also fortuitously the need to link such developments to the broader regeneration targets. The long-term intention was however to get as many of these facilities in the town as practically and financially possible – but this would need to come over a longer timeframe.

Resolved:-

That a map of all sixty community venues be provided to panel members.

15. Winter Preparations

The Chair welcomed Alex Deans, Head of Highways, and Dean Trussler, Emergency Planning Officer, who provided a verbal presentation on the council's plans to manage the occurrence of severe weather.

A number of questions were raised and suggestions for further improvement of the plan. Whilst the plans in general seemed to be sufficient, members strongly suggested added work be carried out to ensure that the needs and safety of elderly residents be considered further including the potential of gritting pathways in front of key service areas like GPs or local shops. Members queried as to why all roads in Slough, including side roads, could not be gritted. The Officers confirmed that whilst this would be ideal, there were severe constraints in terms of staff and money available to carry this out.

Members thanked the officers for the presentation and requested that a map of salt bins and their location across the borough be made available.

Resolved:-

That an A3 sized map of the location of salt bins be sent to all panel members.

16. Housing Benefit - Following up on Audit Commission Inspection 2010

The Chair welcomed Charlie McKenna, Head of Benefits, and Judith Davids, Assistant Director, Customer and ICT Services, who presented a paper on the work the council had done to address the recommendations made in the last Audit Commission Inspection into Housing Benefits in 2010.

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A number of questions were raised including the area of least progress made, how the issue of HMOs was not being abused, the general waiting times and the work ongoing to reduce waiting times and the nature of the benefits hub.

The Officer stated that amongst all the positive work that had been carried out, an area where progress had not been as hoped was encouraging take-up amongst particularly hard to reach groups such as Somali and smaller groupings of Eastern European communities. And this was despite a concerted effort being made with letters, other communiqué and personal visits being arranged. The issue of HMOs had been identified as a key concern. In fact surveying the demographics of Slough, a key group that was of concern were single men, between the age group of 20-45. For this group, and allowing for resources, the policy was to have a site visit to the address to confirm address details. The Assistant Director confirmed that waiting times remained an issue and this was despite the progress that had been made in reducing waiting times from 21 to 12 minutes. Further work was being planned including better managing the allocation of work, using specialist hubs and utilising technology better to improve the overall customer experience.

Members requested further details on the effect of the fast track desk offer advice to customers on proposed waiting times.

Resolved:-

That the Assistant Director for Customer and ICT Services provides information as to whether the fast track desk offer advice to customers on proposed waiting times.

17. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information

Members considered an information paper on the Flood Risk Assessment. The Chair advised panel members to consider the report outside of the meeting and direct any queries or comments back to the Scrutiny Officer.

18. Forward Work Programme

Members asked for the following papers to be included in forthcoming agendas

- A paper on Traffic Light Synchronisation (5th December 2011)
- An update paper on Prostitution (March 1st 2012)

19. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 5th December 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.45 pm)