

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 16th January, 2012.

- Present:** Councillors Minhas (Chair), Carter, Munawar, Sohal, Strutton and A S Wright (Vice-Chair)
- Non voting Co-opted Members Present:** Sandra Malik, Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents
- Also present under Rule 30:** Councillors Chaudhry
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Buchanan, Dar and Plenty

PART 1

31. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

32. Minutes of the last meeting held on 5 December 2011

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 5 December 2011 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Community Centres – Future Provision

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel that a map of community venues was available for viewing in the meeting room.

Winter Preparations

The Chairs asked for, and received, confirmation that requested map of salt bin locations across the Borough had been circulated to the Panel.

33. Member Questions

No questions had been received.

34. Libraries Progress Report

Claire Skeates, Client Development Manager (Libraries), Liz McMillan (Library Services) and Geoff Elgar (Essex Libraries) introduced the report to the Panel detailing the progress made against the five year Libraries Strategy that had been approved by Cabinet in September 2009. In addition, the Panel also considered the performance of the Library Service following the first year of the five year contract with Essex County Council, and priorities for the future.

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The Panel noted the six priorities behind the Strategy, and the improvements in stock discounts through the new contract along with the introduction of self-service issues/returns, increased opening hours, online facilities and greater accessibility through joined up working between services which have combined to improve the overall customer experience.

The Panel discussed the decline in visitor numbers and book issues, which was part of a national trend, but noted that some of the newer libraries in Slough, such as Cippenham had improved in these areas. Claire Skeates confirmed that the focus for the remaining three years of the Strategy would be increasing visits, maintaining stock, developing partnerships, further improving opening hours, reducing costs, improving IT services and the full integration of community hubs, such as in Chalvey.

The Panel considered the impact the road works in the centre of Slough might be having on the visitor numbers for Central Library which have fallen, and was of great concern. It was felt that the drop in numbers could not all be related to the road works, and asked what additional work was being done to reverse this trend. Members were informed that this was part of a historic trend in visitor numbers, and that the older building did not provide an engaging environment. However, the increase in online users along with improvements to IT equipment and small refurbishments could make the Central Library more user-friendly. The installation of the museum along with museum displays in the library will also improve visitor numbers.

Members discussed the use of the library by students and how the libraries could engage with this group of users. The Panel also stressed the importance of using the lessons learned from successful libraries like Cippenham, although this was aided by Big Lottery funding, and Langley for other developments such as the Britwell Hub and The Curve.

Looking service-wide, the increase in online usage, along with both Langley and Britwell libraries doing well demonstrated that the staff were providing the right service, with the freeing up of staff through the use of self-service helping with this.

Resolved:

- 1) to note the good work that has been done to date to improve the Libraries Service, and the successes of the satellite libraries at Cippenham and Langley; and
- 2) that the Panel's comments would be incorporated into the upcoming review of Libraries.

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35. Tour of Chalvey Community Centre

Avtar Lakhan, Business Support Manager, took the Panel around Chalvey Community Centre so that they could review the building and services that were now being provided there.

Resolved – that details of the weekly/monthly programme of activities and adults learning classes available at the Centre be circulated to the Panel.

36. Chalvey Community Centre

Following the tour of the facilities at Chalvey Community Centre, the Panel considered what they felt was working well with the development and what they felt could be improved upon.

The Panel discussed the success of the satellite library, along with the level of engagement of the local community that had been demonstrated by the positive uptake of volunteer positions along with the partners that had been involved in the new Centre. The flexible space was seen as a positive, along with a good design and layout of the building.

With the building providing a community hub from scratch, the challenge was seen as generating different types of usage so that the space was regularly used, and the local community recognised the 'drop in' element of the facilities.

Andrew Stevens explained that the project was still in its early stages, having been open only four months and the marketing was still being developed, and the hope was to find a larger partner to draw more people in, and to build up partnership projects.

The Panel discussed which groups used the facilities the most e.g. community voluntary sector, and were reassured that the pricing had remained as it was for the previous facility, was in-line with other Council properties and is favourable against other similar community venues. The Panel also noted that there were areas of the building which groups could use free of charge.

Resolved – to note that comments would be incorporated into the Review of Chalvey Community Centre which would take place in February 2012.

37. Britwell Community Centre

Andrew Stevens, Assistant Director Culture and Skills, introduced the proposals for the Britwell Hub development, with plans to demolish the current tower block replacing it with a number of different low-level housing options for residents, along with a community hub, containing a number of integrated services such as a library and MyCouncil.

The plans for the new community hub were circulated to the Panel.

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The Panel recognised that the proposals should be very successful but did raise concerns that the development faced different challenges to those faced in Chalvey, and in particular the more disparate nature of the voluntary groups in Britwell would mean that excellent signposting would be crucial to creating an effective one-stop shop. Work to ensure fully integrated services would be key to success, along with engagement of local community as it would be a shared responsibility to create the strongest, most sustainable model.

Resolved – to note the proposals for the Britwell Community Hub.

38. Forward Work Programme

The Panel reviewed the Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

Resolved – to add Highways Schemes 2012-13 (Alex Deans) to the 1 March 2012 meeting.

39. Date of Next Meeting - 1 March 2012

The date of the next meeting was confirmed at 1 March 2012.

Resolved – that additional community venues be scouted so that future meetings could take place around Slough where possible.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm)