

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 5th September, 2013.

Present:- Councillors Dar (Chair), Dhillon, Malik, M S Mann, Plenty, Shah, Sohal, Conroy and Royal

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Minhas and Wright

PART 1

10. Election of Chair

In the absence of both the Chair and Vice Chair, the nomination of Councillor Dar as Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel for the duration of the meeting was proposed and seconded. There being no other nominations, it was:

Resolved – that Councillor Dar be elected as Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel for the duration of the meeting.

(Councillor Dar in the Chair)

11. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Malik declared a personal interest relating to Agenda Item 4 as a council tenant.

Councillor Shah declared a personal interest relating to Agenda Items 4 and 5 as a council tenant.

12. Minutes of the last meeting held on 19 June 2013

The minutes of the last meeting held on 19 June 2013 were approved as a correct record.

13. Member Questions

There were no members questions submitted.

14. Adoption of Housing Allocation Scheme 2013-2018

Hamid Khan, Head of Place Shaping, introduced the report setting out the proposed Housing Allocation Scheme 2013-18 and results of the recently completed consultation on the Scheme.

The new Scheme set out how social housing would be allocated to those who were eligible. The new Scheme would be fairer, simpler and more realistic, based on housing need not aspiration. With the demand for social housing in Slough far outstripping housing supply the council would be looking to allocate these scarce resources to those in greatest housing need, who had a track

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record of being good tenants, and those who had contributed positively to their neighbourhoods.

The Panel was informed that a Queens Counsel (QC) had reviewed the proposed scheme and confirmed that it was fit for purpose and legally strong. The QC had also recommended that the initially proposed break up of Slough into three areas be removed so that Slough would be taken as one single area, and that the scheme should include a one offer policy with a 24 month suspension from the list if that one offer was rejected. And Equalities Impact Assessment had also been undertaken and had raised no concerns with the proposed scheme.

The Panel reviewed the results of the consultation and discussed the one offer policy which 61% of respondents had disagreed with. Members were particularly concerned at the apparent hardness of a 24 month suspension from the list if the one offer had been rejected. It was felt that this could be viewed as disproportionate, when the same suspension would be applied to someone found guilty of fraud.

Members noted that neighbouring boroughs, and most London boroughs had introduced similar one offer schemes, and that the scheme would provide flexibility to the system allowing the council to help those in the most need.

Resolved –

- 1) that in light of the current situation in Slough regarding the ratio of properties available to numbers on the Housing Register, the Panel endorsed the Allocations Policy as set out, with the inclusion of a one offer policy and 24 month suspension from the Register if this was refused;
- 2) that a list of refusal reasons that had been given over the previous 12-18 months would be circulated at the next meeting; and
- 3) that a report assessing the impact of the introduction of the new scheme would be provided to the Panel after six months.

15. Tenant Led Co-Regulation in Slough - Slough Customer Senate (SCS)

John Griffiths, Head of Housing Management, and Vivianne Royal, Chair of the Slough Customer Senate, introduced the report setting out the current arrangements for tenant scrutiny in Slough.

The process of setting up the current tenant scrutiny structure in Slough began in 2011, with the recruitment eight Senate representatives (out of 18 who expressed an interest). The Senate currently had seven members, with an ongoing process of attempting to recruit more. The Senate had completed two major reviews since January 2012: Repairs and Maintenance Review; and Caretakers Review; in addition to this, a review into Customer Complaints was now underway.

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The primary difficulty had been recruitment, with initial interest often not leading to full applications or appointment to the Senate. This had a knock on impact as the membership of the Senate was unable to cope with the level of work required.

The Panel discussed the need for the Senate to remain independent from the Housing Service, and that it would need to develop so that it was driving it's own agenda going forward. Communication and the recruitment process would be key to this, both of which needed to be more effective.

Resolved –

- 1) that Vivianne Royal and the Scrutiny Officer investigate how to improve communication between the Panel and Senate, particularly in relation to work programming; and
- 2) an update on progress made in recruitment to the Senate be programmed in to the Panel's work programme.

16. The Role of Caretakers in Supporting Neighbourhoods

John Griffiths, Head of Housing Management, introduced the report setting out how the Caretaker Service was being reviewed and restructured to better meet the needs of the community it serves going forward in a consistent way.

Particular elements being looked at were ensuring that the equipment used by the Caretakers was fit for purpose, with new vans being procured and improved technology e.g. mobile phones being issued. Caretakers were also being given training in anti-social behaviour and safeguarding to improve links with other services. It was hoped that a career grade would be introduced for Caretakers to provide a suitable career path, improve the stability of the workforce and assist with issues of recruitment. Housing Services would also be introducing an improved inspections regime to keep standards of service high.

The Panel discussed the need to ensure that the details of the service were adapt to improve provision e.g. ability of Caretakers to check lighting in areas when they only inspected during daylight hours.

Resolved – to receive the Star Survey next autumn and assess the proposed improvements to the Caretaker Service at that time.

17. Forward Work Programme

Resolved –

- 1) to add the Star Survey to it's agenda on 6 November 2013; and
- 2) the agenda item on management and prevention of rent arrears/voids/damage to housing stock be moved to 8 January 2014.

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Resolved – to note the 2013/14 attendance record for the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

19. Date of Next Meeting

Resolved –

- 1) that an extraordinary meeting of the Panel would be held on 30 October 2013 to discuss the relationship between Slough and Heathrow; and
- 2) that the next regular meeting of the Panel would be held on 6 November 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.05 pm)