

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 6th November, 2013.

Present:- Councillors Minhas (Chair), Dar, Malik, M S Mann, Plenty, Shah, Sohal and Wright (Vice-Chair) (until 8.00 pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Parmar

PART 1

22. Apologies

None.

23. Declarations of Interest

None.

24. Minutes of the last meeting held on 5 September 2013

The minutes of the last meeting held on 5th September, 2013 were approved as a correct record.

25. Member Questions

None received.

26. Call in: Management of Environmental Services Contract (Line Painting Element)

The Head of Highways introduced a report in response to the request submitted by Councillor Plenty, to scrutinise the management of the line painting element of the Environmental Services contract.

Councillor Plenty had raised concerns regarding the management and control of the yellow no parking line contract (including disabled bay painting). He felt that there had been little or no control of the contract and in some cases lines had not been painted 3 months after a request had been made. He advised that Member casework had indicated dissatisfaction and Stage 1 complaints had not achieved a satisfactory outcome.

The Panel was advised that yellow line and road marking painting was dealt with under the 15 year Environmental Services Contract and had operated since 2002. Quarterly strategic meetings were held and monthly meetings considered programmed work and general performance of the contractor (led by the Head of Highways). The operation of road markings (yellow no parking line painting) within the contract was a transport operation.

Members noted that an Officer of the Council would design a particular scheme and issue the works order to the contractor with a time limit for completion. The Officer would monitor the work to ensure timely completion,

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and sign off the work when completed to a satisfactory standard. It was highlighted that the Council only paid for lines laid and not for the cost of return visits (maximum 3).

It was noted that works for the provision of road marking, including new or the refreshing of double yellow lines, were ordered by the council's Parking Team in the Transport Division. Due to the nature of these works the contractor sometimes had difficulty painting the yellow lines due to parked cars on the street. When this happened the contractor would visit the site in conjunction with other local works to try and complete the outstanding job. The contractor could not issue an invoice for lining works until the scheme of works was completed.

The Contractor addressed the Panel and accepted that better communication was needed to overcome problem areas. This would be achieved through closer monitoring and development of a spreadsheet which identified all ordered and outstanding lining and signing works from the Parking Team. This had led to some improvements but required a concerted effort by the Contractor to keep this spreadsheet constantly updated. This would ensure that any updates were passed to the Parking Team, allowing greater control.

Members raised a number of concerns/ questions during the ensuing debate including:

- It was thought that the work completed in the Foxborough Ward on the previous day would not have been completed had the matter not been referred to the Panel for scrutiny.
- No typical timescales were provided for completion of works from the order date. Why did it take 3 months to complete a job?
- What reassurances could the Contractor give that the problem areas would improve?
- Some corner areas of a road were reported as incomplete and remained so even though an Officer had advised it would be completed after a week.
- In relation to a pilot scheme in the Central Ward, why had boxed areas been created where people had previously paid to have a dropped kerb installed? (It was agreed that the Member would give details to the officer to investigate).
- Was the Contractor penalised for not completing the work within an agreed timescale?

In response, the Contractor discussed the process for line painting and explained that often multiple visits to the site were needed due to parked cars and other obstructions. He accepted that the Contractor had been at fault in not replying back to the Client Officer and multiple visits to the site had not been recorded. It was confirmed that payment was made for each metre of the job completed. In future steps would be taken to prioritise and programme work better and the possibility of putting down temporary road markings would be investigated. The Officer explained that it would be unfair to penalise the

Contractor if roads could not be completed due to parked cars. The Officer was unable to confirm whether a penalty notice had ever been issued.

Resolved- That the report be noted and that an update report be submitted to the Panel in September 2014

27. Star Survey Results

The Head of Housing Management introduced a report detailing the findings of the Star Survey, which was used by social landlords to measure residents' satisfaction with service provision.

It was noted that the cost of the survey was £20,000 and was covered by existing funds within the Housing Revenue Account. The survey would be repeated every year to test resident satisfaction and look for continued improvement.

Members noted that the Housing Service carried out the survey of all tenants and leaseholders between April and June 2013 and the Slough Customer Senate selected questions to be added to the core questions in the survey to support their scrutiny review programme. CR Market Research was selected to undertake the survey and 1,794 responses were received, representing a 26% return rate from tenants. The Committee noted that a 95% confidence rate was indicated but only 80 responses were received from leaseholders.

It was highlighted that residents of Langley St Marys and Kedermister were generally less satisfied than residents living elsewhere in Slough. There was also room for improvement in residents perceptions of the Housing Service when listening to and acting on resident's views and value for money with service charges. A project to consider service charges was underway.

The Officer discussed planned improvements and joint working with the Senate and local Area Panels.

Members raised a number of comments/ questions in the ensuing debate:

- Was the questionnaire available to view as it was not included in the report? The Officer advised that this would be forwarded to Members.
- How were the questions formed? The Office advised that the questions were open ended and he felt that they needed to be more Ward specific.
- Were there different questions for leaseholders? It was confirmed this was the case.
- In relation to service charges the Officer advised that work was needed to look at the levels of charges but currently there were no resources to do this.

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- Who had paid for the survey? The Officer advised that the costs were covered by the Housing Revenue Account and the survey would continue to be conducted annually on an independent basis.
- In response to a question on tenant input with questions, Members were advised that some of the questions were relevant nationally but others were particularly relevant to Slough tenants.
- There was evidence that residents living in Langley and Kedermister were generally less satisfied than residents elsewhere in Slough. What was the reason for this? The Officer advised that there could be issues with management and this would be addressed. He welcomed the suggestion that Members contribute to a workshop session.
- In response to a further question the Assistant Director advised that the restructure in Housing had been delayed. He was confident that this would be finalised by December and a new Neighbourhood Service would be created by 1st January, 2014.

Resolved- That the report be noted and that a working group be convened to work with the Senate and Council members to review the survey content in future. (Councillors Malik and Shah agreed to represent the Panel)

28. Older People's Housing Offer

The Assistant Director, Housing and Environment, outlined a report to provide members with an overview of the current services provided by Housing in relation to older people's accommodation and recent changes.

The Officer discussed the history of the Sheltered Housing Service and the introduction of the Supporting People initiative which had removed care and support charges from basic housing benefits. The Panel noted that there were nine operational complexes providing accommodation and following a review some units had been released to general needs housing, which meant that for example the dwellings could be let to a person of any age. Due to the specific nature of their design the supported housing complexes remained designated as such and except in very rare cases, individual dwellings were retained solely for those over the age of 60.

It was highlighted that the nine sheltered schemes which had one bed or bed sit flats all had common rooms and laundry facilities. Members noted the availability of community alarms and provision of housing for frail residents. The Officer advised that with the increasing need for extra care provision, it was anticipated that in future, some of the existing complexes would be assessed for the potential to extend or convert into extra care facilities. Residents would be consulted on any changes.

The Panel was reminded that the Council was no longer the provider of supported housing services but merely one of many landlords across the Borough who could provide accommodation to clients in need of support.

Members raised a number of questions/ comments in the ensuing debate, including:

- Were there any blocks that catered for those aged 60 years or over? The Officer advised that some outlying properties were removed from stock as their location was not convenient for older tenants. The Member highlighted that it was important to retain a sense of community for older residents and this could be achieved by moving older tenants from higher to lower floors.
- A Member questioned the use of facilities within the accommodation and whether residents were consulted. He was advised that consultation did take place.

Resolved- That the report be noted.

29. Management of Houses of Multiple Occupancy

The Housing Standards Manager introduced a report to update Members on the management and licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Slough.

It was highlighted that the HMO licensing function supported the priorities in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and contributed to reducing inequalities in health through preventing access to poor quality sub-standard housing whilst achieving the required mandatory licensing conditions.

The Panel noted that 2 full time vacancies existed within the team that managed the licensing of HMOs but it was hoped that two interim Officers would be appointed in the near future.

The Officer discussed the number of HMOs in the Borough and the cost of obtaining a licence. In November, 2011, additional authority had been approved to allow Officers to tackle problems linked with poor HMO's in the Chalvey area, relating to anti-social behaviour taking place in and around the location of HMO's. Residents at a recent Chalvey Community Forum meeting had indicated that they had noticed improvements in the area, with landlords doing more work to improve their properties.

The Officer discussed targets for service delivery and advised that the appointment of further staff together with the arrival of neighbourhood enforcement teams into the proposed neighbourhood services directorate would enhance the ability to licence further HMO properties.

A number of questions were raised in the ensuing debate, including:

- What was the incentive for a landlord to become licensed? The Officer advised this was mandatory and a landlord would be prosecuted if he/she did not hold a licence.
- How was the estimate of 2199 HMOs in the Borough calculated? The Officer advised this was estimated from a stock condition survey.

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- Were all premises inspected prior to being licensed? Yes-this was a mandatory requirement.
- Did Officer's have powers of entry? This was the case and authorisation could be requested through the Magistrates Court.
- Was the register of HMOs available on line? A Member thought it would be useful if Members could access this so they could report any properties which they felt should be considered for inclusion in the register. The Officer advised that it was available online and it could also be forwarded to Members.

It was agreed that a copy of the licensed HMO register be forwarded to all members for information.

Resolved- That the report be noted.

30. Forward Work Programme

Resolved- That the work programme be noted.

31. Date of Next Meeting - 8 January 2014

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 8th January 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm)