

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 30th March 2015
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PORTFOLIOS

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES – GARAGE MANAGEMENT

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide further information as requested by the Panel in relation to management of the council's garage stock.

2 Recommendations proposed/action

- 2.1 The Panel is requested to note the information contained within the report.

3 Corporate Priorities

- 3.1 This report contributes towards the delivery of the 2014/15 Service Plan for Neighbourhood Services.

This Service Plan relates to Slough Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2014/15 and the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy 2013-16 which includes the following objectives:

Objective 2: *'Seek opportunities and implement initiatives to optimise revenue through new income streams, partnership working and achieve natural efficiencies through streamlining the delivery of services.'*

Objective 4: *'Implement creative management to improve quality of service to create and maintain attractive neighbourhoods that customers are proud to live in.'*

And connects to the following Corporate priorities:

Corporate Plan

- Improve the customer experience
- Deliver high quality services that meet local needs
- Develop new ways of working
- Achieve value for money

Sustainable Communities Strategy

- Economy and Skills

- Housing
- Regeneration and the Environment

Other implications

3.2 (a) Financial (Compulsory section to be included in all reports)

A separate strategic review of garage management is underway and will implement processes aimed at reducing the number of unused spaces and therefore reduce lost income; address sites of low demand; scoping potential redevelopment where there is minimal likelihood of increasing interest/lettings; and prioritising investment in the garage stock to sustain those sites with long term letting potential.

The development of a Garage Strategy from 2015/16 will contain financial information covering:

- the cost of ensuring existing sites remain fit for purpose and are safe and secure;
- the process for carrying out health-check reviews, leading to redevelopment of outdated, unpopular or unsatisfactory garage sites that could help deliver other outcomes in relation to the provision of safer estates or new social housing;

3.3 (b) Risk Management

Risk and Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out when forming proposals for alterations to service.

In relation to the review itself, the following initial risks have been considered:

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal	Undertake a review of the parking facilities licence agreement to ensure it is fit for purpose.	<p>Completed – October 2014 A review of the licence agreement used for parking facilities has ensured that the council is equipped with the necessary tools to manage parking facilities effectively.</p> <p>Proposal – April 2015 To terminate and reissue all parking facility licence agreements to harmonise various agreement types and ensure they are all covered by the same terms and conditions.</p>
Property	<p>Undertaking an inspection of all garage sites to rate their condition, facilities and overall suitability.</p> <p>To develop a rating process through which identified sites will be reviewed, prioritised for attention.</p>	<p>In progress – January 2015 An opportunity to create a stock condition database of existing garage sites.</p> <p>Enable the review of garage sites against a number of 'health-check' indicators leading to a borough-wide analysis of all parking facility</p>

		locations and their long term sustainability.
Human Rights	None	None
Health & Safety	Using the site inspections to identify areas of risk or concern for immediate attention.	To reduce the risk of any accident, injury or claim against the council in relation to defective stock and ensure obligations under the Defective Premises and Occupiers Liability Act are managed.
Employment issues	None	None
Equalities issues	None	None
Community Support	None	None
Communications	None	None
Community Safety	None at this stage	None
Financial	None at this stage	
Timetable for delivery		
Project capacity	Within existing staffing resources.	None.
Other	None	None

3.4 (c) Human Rights and other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or other legal implications in connection with this report.

3.5 (e) Equalities Impact Assessment (*compulsory section to be included in all reports*)

There are no significant changes to policy or service provision at this stage that requires the completion of EIAs.

3.6 (f) Workforce

There are no workforce implications as the current Garage Officer role has been adopted into the new Estate Services Monitoring Officer role – a post created within the ongoing restructure of Neighbourhood Services.

4 **Previous Scrutiny and review**

4.1 In July 2014, the Panel was provided with answers to questions raised regarding the current approach to garages and efforts being taken to address lettability.

4.2 Panel requested further detailed information in the form of a report for consideration. The questions raised by the Panel are as follows:

1. What is the current garage strategy?
2. Where are there the most vacancies?
3. How many are earmarked for possible demolition for housing?
4. How many are earmarked for possible rebuilding to a larger size?
5. Where are there insufficient garages to meet demand? Can this be identified by street?
6. What pro-active repairs/inspections are carried out?
7. What is the policy of lighting within garage areas? Are unlit garages harder to let?

8. What percentage of retained garages are properly lit?
9. What is the schedule for providing additional lighting?
10. Who is responsible for repairs to garage lighting?

5. Responses to questions raised

Responses to questions 2 to 10 can be given in factual answers as follows:

5.1 Question 2 – Where are there the most vacancies?

The table below shows a breakdown of the current parking facilities (garages, garage bases and car ports) in debit on the Capita Housing system and their current occupancy status –

Ward	Property Type						Total	% Occupancy	
	Garage		Car Port		Garage Base			Let	Void
	Let	Void	Let	Void	Let	Void			
Baylis	13	11	0	0	0	2	26	50.0	50.0
Britwell	140	312	0	0	0	0	452	31.0	69.0
Central	17	50	0	0	0	0	67	25.4	74.6
Chalvey	88	124	35	5	2	0	254	49.2	50.8
Cippenham Green	24	27	0	0	16	18	85	47.1	52.9
Cippenham Meadow	12	12	0	0	16	12	52	53.8	46.2
Elliman	41	75	0	0	0	0	116	35.3	64.7
Farnham	4	20	0	0	0	0	24	16.7	83.3
Foxborough	73	94	0	0	0	3	170	42.9	57.1
Haymill	118	238	0	0	1	20	377	31.6	68.4
Kederminster	169	256	0	0	14	15	454	40.3	59.7
Langley	88	112	0	0	0	0	200	44.0	56.0
Upton	11	12	0	0	0	0	23	47.8	52.2
Wexham	49	94	0	0	30	97	270	29.3	70.7
Total	847	1437	35	5	79	167	2570	37.4	62.6

Breakdown of void levels (highest first) – Garages by Ward:

Ward	Garage		Total	% Occupancy	
	Let	Void		Let	Void
Farnham	4	20	24	16.7	83.3
Central	17	50	67	25.4	74.6
Britwell	140	312	452	31.0	69.0
Haymill	118	238	356	33.1	66.9
Wexham	49	94	143	34.3	65.7
Elliman	41	75	116	35.3	64.7
Kederminster	169	256	425	39.8	60.2
Chalvey	88	124	212	41.5	58.5
Foxborough	73	94	167	43.7	56.3
Langley	88	112	200	44.0	56.0
Cippenham Green	24	27	51	47.1	52.9
Upton	11	12	23	47.8	52.2
Cippenham Meadows	12	12	24	50.0	50.0
Baylis	13	11	24	54.2	45.8
Total	847	1437	2284	37.1	62.9

The areas of particular concern as shown by the above breakdown are the wards of:

- Britwell 69.0%
- Haymill 66.9%
- Wexham 65.7%
- Elliman 64.7%
- Kederminster 60.2%
- Chalvey 58.5%
- Foxborough 56.3%
- Langley 56.0%

Breakdown of void levels (highest first) – Garage Bases by Ward:

Ward	Garage Base		Total	% Occupancy	
	Let	Void		Let	Void
Baylis	0	2	2	0.0	100.0
Foxborough	0	3	3	0.0	100.0
Haymill	1	20	21	4.8	95.2
Wexham	30	97	127	23.6	76.4
Cippenham Green	16	18	34	47.1	52.9
Kederminster	14	15	29	48.3	51.7
Cippenham Meadows	16	12	28	57.1	42.9
Britwell	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Central	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Chalvey	2	0	2	100.0	0.0
Elliman	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Farnham	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Langley	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Upton	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Total	79	167	246	32.1	67.9

5.3 Question 3 - how many are earmarked for possible demolition for housing?

9 out of 28 sites have been considered for potential to develop new social housing. Of these sites, none have progressed to on site stage, but are in progress towards obtaining scheme approval.

5.4 Question 4 – how many are earmarked for possible rebuilding to a larger size?

7 out of 28 sites are being considered for redevelopment/reinvestment. With all these sites, consultation will determine whether larger sized garages is a priority for residents and will be a default consideration when considering scheme option appraisals.

5.5 Question 6 – what proactive repairs/inspections are carried out?

Estate inspections

Currently, garage areas are included in the estate inspection process, which are carried out on a timetabled basis by Neighbourhood Housing Officers.

Any visible repairs affecting the safety or aesthetic of the garage site are reported to Interserve and are typically carried out within a 5 week priority timescale unless

urgent.

The types of works raised from these inspections include:

- Removal of fly-tipping
- Removal of abandoned vehicles
- Securing of doors to void garages
- Replacement of damaged doors affecting security

It is not currently possible to detail the number of jobs raised as a result of these inspections as they are not recorded centrally; however, the estate inspection process is being reviewed so that work and/or management actions following an estate inspection are recorded so that this level of reporting information can be collated.

Caretaker attendance

Some garage sites within the borough are included within the Caretaking service attendance schedules.

The sites that are included have typically been added because of the following factors:

- History of rubbish accumulation/fly-tipping requiring regular weekly inspections and attention
- Their proximity to dwellings and the visual impact of rubbish accumulation and or damage to an estate or block
- Concentrated neighbourhood enforcement activity as identified by Neighbourhood Action Group/Area Panel requests.

Garage officer inspections

The former Garage Officer undertook visual inspections during the lettings process and identified any repairs or estate work noted during an offer visit.

Additionally, the Garage Officer and Neighbourhood Housing Officer would respond to concerns raised by garage tenants and would liaise with the neighbourhood housing and enforcement teams in addressing those issues of concern.

5.6 Question 7 – What is the policy on lighting for garage areas? Are unlit garages harder to let?

There is no current clear policy on lighting for garage areas. The garage stock has been developed over many years and consequently most garages sites do not have lighting.

A large number of garage sites sit on pockets of housing land surrounded by houses and flats. Traditionally, these sites were not provided with an additional supply for power or were in close proximity to communal power supplies to enable lighting to be provided. The garage strategy and redevelopment process will include assessments on the need for lighting including when and how it is provided.

Anecdotally, demand for garage sites is affected by a number of factors, one of which is lack of lighting. Reasons for refusal of all garage offers has not historically been collated; therefore it is not possible to evidence the numbers of offers refused because of lighting by each garage location.

The current approach to existing garages is that it is maintained where it is provided, but no new lighting installations will be made outside of a sustainability review of each garage site.

5.7 Question 8 – what percentage of retained garages are properly lit?

This information is in progress of being collated through a detailed revisit of all site inspections due for completion in January 2015.

5.8 Question 9 – what is the schedule for providing additional lighting?

As with question 8, the revisiting of garage inspections will impact on the future prioritisation of garage redevelopment works in accordance with the planned review of the garage strategy.

5.9 Question 10 – Who is responsible for repairs to garage lighting?

The Council is predominantly the responsible party for repairs to garage lighting. This is because garage sites/compounds are not adopted by Highways and therefore remain the responsibility of the Council.

Confusion in this area has been caused by the fact that SSE has on occasions been the specialist contractor chosen to repair lighting columns. This is because of their experience in managing/repairing public street lighting and these are not resources that Interserve can provide with their own staff.

There have been incidents of delayed repairs to garage lighting because of the low priority attributed by SSE to such repair requests.

Additionally, as older lighting columns become obsolete and availability of parts reduces, the cost of replacing lighting columns becomes prohibitive and has to be considered in the wider context of whether that repair investment can be justified for sites subject to low demand and possible redevelopment.

5.10 In response to additional Member questions, the Council acknowledges that over time a number of private residents have created vehicular access to rear gardens through council-owned sites. Some of these are with permission, some are not.

Through the ongoing garage site inspection process, all non-standard or traversing access locations are being identified and if a licence is not already in place, discussions with homeowners will take place so as to ensure appropriate legal arrangements for crossing council-owned land are in place.

The review of the garage strategy will include the annual fee paid for licences and will ensure that this is set at an appropriate level to ensure the council covers its expenditure and/or officer time in creating, managing and renewing licence agreements.

6 Improving the Customer Experience

6.1 Customer satisfaction with the management of garages is very low. This reflects the resources given to management of the garage stock over recent years.

6.2 Customers have also been frustrated in the length of time they wait to be allocated a

garage and an allocation process that does allocate at regular intervals to enable turnover of the waiting list.

6.3 In order to address these concerns, a number of initiatives have been implemented to improve customer experience with the garage application and letting process.

These include:

- A simplifying of the application process so that information about how the council manages applications for garages is more readily available
- Front line staff, including MyCouncil, have received guidance on how applications are processed, including refreshed customer service standards for application processing times and communication
- Review of forms to ensure they seek relevant information in a clearer and improved format

6.4 As of 6th November 2014, there were 185 active applications on the garage waiting list.

A review of all live applications was commenced to ensure only applications from customers still seeking a garage remained on the list. There is always natural wastage from such reviews (customers who have moved, who no longer require a garage, or have obtained one elsewhere) and it is envisaged that the number of live applications following the review will reduce.

This review will be completed in January 2015.

6.5 From October 2014, there are now three officers with responsibility for managing estate activities, including garages. This will ensure that staff are readily available to deal with customer concerns and contact and improve response times for resolving parking-related enquiries.

7 Development of a Garage Strategy

7.1 Management of parking facilities transferred into the new Estate Services team in October 2014.

Prior to transfer, a Garage Strategy group had been formed to oversee the co-ordination of solutions to low demand, poor condition, environmental and management issues to assess the future sustainability of identified sites.

The group assessed identified sites and applied key questions to identify whether existing sites warranted reinvestment or whether alternative uses could be considered.

- Is there a demand?
- Are the garages providing people what they want – size, location, what they can be used for etc.
- If there is no demand, what are the alternatives?
- If no future use, do we demolish – and then do what?
- Can we use the land for other things (housing, gardens, workshops, etc)?
- Are there planning restrictions preventing suitable future use?
- Should we demolish and replace with parking – is there a demand, will it be used?

- What are the costs compared to maintaining garages that are not used?
- Will demolishing reduce ASB, what are the cost benefits compared to not demolishing
- If we demolish and rebuild larger garages in fewer numbers on some sites – is there a demand/ what can we charge / when will full cost recovery happen?
- If we demolish and do nothing what are the cost benefits compared to maintenance and ASB?
- Do we need to gate as interim arrangement – what are the costs and benefits?

7.2 A review of the Neighbourhood Services Garage Strategy is current being undertaken with a view to proposing a revised strategy for parking facilities for the period 2015-2020.

7.3 The aim of the strategy will to implement processes that will ensure garages and parking facilities are maintained correctly and contribute to the sustainability of our estates and neighbourhoods and provide a well managed income stream for the council.

7.4 With closer links to the asset management strategy and with a greater focus on review, assessment, scheme development and delivery, the strategy will require evidence-based reviews leading to consistent and sensible prioritising on investment based on successful outcomes for residents and the council.

7.5 Key strategic objectives will include:

Ensure that parking products are attractive to customers, are provided only where evidence exists that they are needed and contribute to vibrant, well-managed estates and remain economically viable;

Contribute towards the environment and neighbourhoods in a safe manner and do not present unnecessary management situations that affect the quality of residents' lives;

Residents are involved in the process of review to give them opportunities to influence the choices made through redevelopment/reinvestment;

Provide value for money and supported by a well-run maintenance and repair service that ensure garages remain fit for purpose and attractive to existing and prospective residents.

7.6 The Garage Strategy group is being retained. The Estate Services Manager will lead on the development of a revised garage strategy document by the end of January 2015.

8 Timetable for updates

8.1 It is intended to provide an update report to Panel in March 2015 including the revised Garage Strategy and outcomes of the ongoing garage site condition surveys.

9 Appendices Attached (if any)

9.1 None