

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd September, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Morris (Vice Chair), Dar, Davis, N Holledge, Malik, Mansoor, Sohal and Wright

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Smith and Strutton

PART 1

11. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Malik and Morris declared their interests as tenants in Slough Borough Council (SBC) property.

12. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29th June 2015

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2015 be approved as an accurate record.

13. Member Questions

Members raised a question regarding allotments prior to the meeting. An answer was provided and circulated to members.

14. A4 Brands Hill

Given the request by the Panel at the last meeting, the Transport Signs Regulations and General Directions guidance, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges standards and guidance and the details of the stage 1, 2 and 3 safety audits had been presented to members. These documents provided detailed reasoning for the decision made with regards to the A4 road design.

In addition, a video had recently emerged of a parked lorry causing problems for road users. Members were informed that there was a loading ban at the site in question.

The Panel raised the following points in discussions:

- There were concerns over the length of time it was taking for orders to be enforced. Parking were currently being chased with regards to the order, with SBC officers monitoring the situation. The loading ban which would come into place allowed for instant ticketing; however, given the presence of approximately 70 other such issues it could not be the sole priority. However, members stated that the delay was not acceptable and officers would continue to pursue the matter.
- The arrow road markings should be implemented quickly, as no order was required for their completion. Rain delays had hampered work, but

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.15

contractors would be asked to resolve this. Members would be informed on progress.

- The loading ban required a period of consultation followed by the advertising of the order for 21 days. Objections then had the potential to lengthen the process. Members would be informed on progress. The red lines which allowed for instant ticketing were only valid in London.
- As pedestrians and cyclists needed consideration in addition to motorists, pavements could not be removed to allow for a double lane road in both directions. A reduction in the pavement would not be sufficient to allow the installation of an additional traffic lane. The construction of a dual carriageway would also involve planning issues.
- The policy on bus stops did not just apply in the SBC area but along the 78 bus route to Heathrow. Different locations were subject to variations in arrangements, and bus users had not given negative feedback on the impact on the service. There had also been a consultation process regarding bus shelters and stops. However, members reported that motorists had been negatively affected in some areas (e.g. Colnbrook).
- Bus stops which had been filled in could have driver-operated traffic signals to allow buses to leave. However these would also require a traffic signal further down the road to stop buses.
- The last meeting had requested the police advice on the absence of a right turn by the BP garage. The response received was that the police would not be able to monitor the site constantly; however, this response was in relation to enforcement rather than safety. Members wished to note that their concerns were about deterrence rather than apprehending those who ignored the sign and wished officers to return to the matter. They also noted that Police Community Support Officers had indicated support for a no right turn sign at Parish Council meetings.
- The present double yellow lines allowed for a 5 minute stay, which was causing significant problems (as highlighted in a recent video, publicised on Streetlife). Large vehicles in the single lane were causing users of that lane to occupy the middle lane in order to gain a view, and in so doing were placing themselves in the opposing direction to oncoming traffic.
- The safety audit had made recommendations to SBC; any of these which were overruled had to be justified.
- The Panel also wished to note its dissatisfaction at the absence of the lead officer and Cabinet member for this discussion.

Resolved:

1. SBC would contact the Department for Transport to make the case for variations with regards to variations in the policy on traffic signs for 3 lane roads. The Panel would then be informed as to the outcome of this discussion.
2. The Panel wished to refer their dissatisfaction on the road lay out for the A4 Brands Hill area to Cabinet, on the grounds of planning, design and implementation. This had led to outstanding safety issues, which rendered the highway as not fit for purpose.

15. Real Time Passenger Information

SBC reported that communications between the companies involved had improved; however, staffing difficulties remained. This meant that whilst improvements were visible, co-ordination and installation difficulties were still holding results back.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The original level of 28% accuracy had improved to a rate around 60-70%. However, this seemed to have halted since the last report. Officers reported that some routes were now running at 98% but that installation of the machinery into the buses was the crucial factor.
- The issue of 'ghost buses' (where updates indicated that a bus was imminent, but then failed to appear with the data disappearing from the RTPI display) remained a concern.
- In April 2015, Cabinet had referred the matter to the Panel. It had indicated that RTPI should be returned to the Cabinet if targets had not been reached.

Resolved: that the matter should be referred to Cabinet, with specific reference to the issue of 'ghost buses'.

16. Littering, fly tipping and enviro-crime pilot project

The litter campaign has focused on the town centre. 480 penalties have been given out, and it was intended to expand the scheme to the bus station. Should it prove possible then an exportation of the scheme to public areas outside the centre of Slough was the aspiration, although economic realities may make this impossible.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Members welcomed the rise in fixed penalty notices, although questioned its lack of application across the borough. Officers responded that a 35% reduction in the budget was a major consideration. However, meetings with the companies involved in supporting delivery were being held to discuss the future. In particular, the focus on high density areas was helping make the campaign economically viable and may be a key consideration in any extension.
- Commercial partners were used to undertake low level activity, with SBC concentrating on closure of cases. This arrangement had improved efficiency.
- Members raised concerns over the level of activity in resolving anti-social behaviour outside of the central area. SBC had assigned officers to areas across the borough and could undertake out of hours work for nominated times. Officers had the powers to intervene in such cases, and members could assist by providing their intelligence on local

issues. Bodies representing local residents could invite SBC representatives to improve communications, as could Parish Councils.

- 70% of penalty notices were paid; however, this did not allow SBC to break even with an average loss of £8 per ticket at present. Despite this, SBC would continue to pursue court measures where applicable to reinforce its message.
- CCTV (using boxes on polls) were being employed to identify fly tipping activity. SBC had been given powers to seize tipper vans 6 months prior to this meeting, with 4 prosecutions having been undertaken. The fly tipping refuse was the responsibility of SBC to clear if the land was held by the Council; on private land, the land owner would be approached to remove the refuse.
- SBC was involved with the police in joint work on anti-social behaviour, with drugs and prostitution also part of these efforts.
- SBC officers would return to the Panel once discussions over a new financial model had been concluded and the tender put out for bids. A new provider was wanted to start work for the beginning of the 2016-17 financial year.
- SBC were visiting local residents to gain local knowledge; a house which had been used to sell drugs had been closed as a result of this. Information from residents was often crucial in securing successful prosecutions. Each area in Slough had a team of officers, with the structure reflecting the structure of local policing.

Resolved: that a report for information on the new financial model would be taken by the Panel in January 2016.

17. Garages strategy

The report provided an update to the Panel, with the waiting list now containing 84 applications. The level of occupancy had risen from 35% to 46%, and a recent review of sites providing a more accurate representation of parking facilities and their locations. The sites had been rated as 'red', 'amber' or 'green', with red sites the least suitable for redeployment for an alternative use and green the most suitable.

The draft strategy involved three key elements; namely:

1. Annual health checks for all sites.
2. Investigations into potential for remodelling, redevelopment, sale or re-use of suitable sites.
3. Proposals for resident involvement.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Members welcomed the rise in level of occupancy; however, officers stated that a precise future target would be impossible to provide. The list of 'red' garages would be passed to Housing Officers at SBC who would then allocate as applicable.

- It was highly probable that the number of garages would fall given the number of sites with no demand and / or no viable future for their present use. SBC was optimistic that the most unsuitable sites could be re-designated.
- Garage sites that have unsuitable structures left on bases will have the structures removed to leave rentable parking spaces. Options had been assessed in such cases.
- New garages had an occupancy rate of 90%; however, parking spaces were not used at the same rate.
- The higher rents for the new garages had been set to enable the recouping of redevelopment costs within 12-14 years.
- Improvements in garage sites and increase in letting was in part due to 'word of mouth' spreading improvements in the service and by increased speed in dealing with new applications.

Resolved: that the Panel was satisfied with the content of the proposed Garages Strategy.

18. Bulky waste collection service

The changes to the service had, in part, been caused by the concerns over enviro-crime reflected in the previous item. Having consulted with community groups, Neighbourhood Action Groups and similar bodies, the view that the current service was too expensive was widely reflected by residents. At present, the fee stood at £30.75 for a collection of any size up to a maximum of 5 bulky items. The service had been outsourced to Amey as part of the 2002 tender, and there was no process for ascertaining if the service user was exempted from payment. As a result, income had not been as high as hoped from the service.

The new proposal ('Pay As You Throw') would be charged at £5 per item up to a maximum of 6 items, with all users to be levied in the same manner. There would also be an online payment portal, to avoid the current situation where residents had to visit a local refuse station to book the service. The online portal could then be expanded to allow reporting of other matters (e.g. broken bins). Overall, it was intended that the redesigned service would be both more affordable and more accessible.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The creation of a specific portal for waste issues would allow for greater use of data in analysing trends and issues. At present, any electronic requests came through as emails and could not be collated with ease.
- The bulky waste collection service would form a part of the wider waste strategy, which would be compiled and presented for discussion by the Cabinet at a later date.
- Amey were not insured to collect asbestos sheets, although this could be revised. At present the refuse station in Chalvey could take wetted sheets; it may be possible to include them as part of 'Pay As You

Throw', although the extra costs of their disposal could lead to a surcharge being paid for anyone requesting their collection.

- The decision to ask pensioners to pay for the service had been made as part of providing an equal system; proposals did also include the possibility of one free collection per year for this group. However, whilst members recognised that no perfect solution was available, it did raise concerns that some vulnerable groups may be dissuaded from using the service.
- Members asked if free collections, by ending the demand for fly tipping, could pay for itself. 58 councils did provide this service, but it led to a very high tonnage of refuse and costed £50-60,000 per annum. There was also a risk that it could encourage the importation of bulky waste from surrounding boroughs.

Resolved: that the Panel supported the proposals in the report, with the exception of 5.8 regarding pensioners. In this case, the Panel requested further work be undertaken on potential exemptions for vulnerable residents.

19. Housing regulation

Members requested a subsequent report on the performance of the housing service in relation to the standards framework. This would also include an evaluation of the value for money offered by the service.

Resolved: that an item on the performance of the housing service be added to the agenda for 28th October 2015.

20. Neighbourhood Services Resident Board's 20 Recommended Key Performance Indicators

The Panel requested information on the performance indicators, and that this should be benchmarked with other comparable authorities. SBC received a quarterly appraisal of the KPIs, with an annual review produced. This would be shared with members when available.

Resolved: that the Panel receive information on KPIs when available.

21. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: that, in addition to the requests already made, the Five Year Plan outcome (Slough to be one of the safest places to live in the Thames Valley) be added to the agenda for 23rd February 2016.

22. Date of Next Meeting - 28th October 2015

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.18 pm)