

Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd September, 2008.

Present:- Councillors Pabbi (Chair), Buchanan, Coad, Dale-Gough, Davis, Haines, Matloob (arrived at 7.30 p.m.), Rasib and Walsh

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Parmar and Swindlehurst

Apologies for Absence:- Barbara Goldstein and Heather Mason (Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents)

PART I

12. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Davis and Walsh declared that they were appointed as Board Members of People 1st (Slough) ALMO.

13. Minutes

The Minutes of the Green and Built Scrutiny Panel held on 24th June 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

14. People 1st- Performance Management Report - July 2008 Update

Andrew Billany, Chief Executive, People 1st (Slough), outlined a report to update Members on the level of performance relating to the 12 key business functions for People 1st(Slough) in July 2008. The report identified how People 1st(Slough) were performing against the set targets for 2008/2009 and how performance compared against the top performing ALMOs in the country.

Members noted that the monthly performance for July continued to show a high level of performance with 8 of the 12 key business functions indicating an improved performance from levels in June. Rent collection had seen a minor improvement from levels in the previous month and the slower rate of increase was attributed in part to the loss of a Senior Rent Recovery Officer. A new Officer had now been appointed and it was expected that collection levels would increase towards target levels in August and beyond.

In relation to the turn around of void properties, staff were carrying out a number of initiatives to improve medium to long term voids, including audits and developing a hard-to-let strategy. It was noted that there was a significant upturn in performance in this area to a 20 day turnaround but the overall performance for the year was 28 days. Performance on repairs had maintained its top quartile and the number of appointments made and kept at 98.57% were good.

Leasehold Service Charge collection had continued to fall below 2007/2008 levels but this was due to a revision in the way this particular indicator was

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calculated. This would be better assessed once a full years collecting performance was available using the new system.

Members noted that no further mystery shopping had been carried out in June but this programme had recommenced in August. All complaints were replied to within the target time in July. Telephone answering for My Council was below target at 84%, against 88% and it was recognised that an improvement in performance was needed. Interserve telephone performance continued to exceed its target for 2008/2009.

Members considered the report and raised a number of comments/questions as follows:-

- A Member requested that an update on rent collection be provided at the next meeting.
- It was requested that a report on leasehold service charges covering the collection and amount of charge and the standard of work done to communal areas be added to the future work programme.
- A Member was concerned that bins and communal areas in Britwell were not being cleaned by the Council or People 1st and she had received a lot of case work concerning this. The work was done eventually but usually this was only through Councillor intervention and not at the request of residents. In response the Chief Executive, People 1st noted that there were hot spot areas of concern and the Britwell area was one of the most challenging areas. Work was being undertaken to address these problems.
- A Member expressed concern over the number of complaints relating to snagging works outstanding in Eden Close and Foxborough Close. It was agreed that the Chief Executive, People 1st would discuss this matter with the Councillor outside of the meeting.
- A concern was expressed that the average time taken to re let homes was often fluctuating from month to month and this could present a serious problem if a re inspection were to take place.
- There was a concern relating to the correlation between void properties and the loss of rental income and the Member asked how many hard-to-let properties there were at present. The Chief Executive would provide this information in a future report.
- A Member commented that she had phoned RBWM that day and her call was answered within one minute; she asked why the service in Slough was not as efficient. The Chief Executive advised that 80% of People 1st (Slough) calls were responded to in 20 seconds.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) A report on Leasehold Service Charges be brought to a future meeting.

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- (c) A detailed report on the number of outstanding void properties and details of the associated loss in rental income be included in future People 1st Management update reports.

15. Activities of Neighbourhood Enforcement Team (NET)- Update Report

The Head of Neighbourhood Enforcement outlined a report to update Members on the Council's enforcement activities that helped to deliver the cleaner and safer neighbourhoods agenda in Slough.

Members were advised that there were three well placed teams based in the North, South and East of the Borough who were able to provide a quick response to local complaints. Members noted the Council's power to deal with issues such as littering, dog fouling, graffiti, and abandoned and untaxed vehicle crimes and that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 had introduced powers to serve Fixed Penalty Notices as an alternative enforcement measure to prosecution.

The Officer discussed the role of Officers within the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team and explained their responsibilities. It was noted that the number of Wardens had been increased from 10 to 14 in the current financial year to reflect the number of Wards in the Borough. Members noted the detail of the main complaints received in 2007/2008 from the public and Members, and details of the enforcement action taken. It was highlighted that fly tipping and the incorrect disposal/storage of domestic and commercial waste was a significant problem in Slough and hotspot areas were routinely identified and patrolled to prevent the problem from escalating. Notices had been erected to warn the fly tippers that they would be prosecuted if caught and where possible surveillance cameras were used.

Bi- weekly Priority Crime Meetings were held so that staff could liaise with the police and community safety team to share intelligence and assess identified priorities.

In relation to staffing it was hoped that a Team Leader vacancy would be filled together with 2 further Warden posts in September 2008, with the final 2 Community Wardens being appointed from January 2009. The operating times of the Warden Service was explained and it was anticipated that the service would operate 7 days per week once the 4 new Wardens were in post. An extensive programme of training had been undertaken by the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team including customer care and dealing with difficult people.

In the subsequent discussion, Members raised a number of comments/questions as follows:-

- Fireworks were now used on a regular basis: a Member asked whether there was a statutory cut off time at night. The Officer responded that new legislation had been created two years previously and it was thought that the cut off time was 11.00 p.m.

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- A Member requested update information on the robberies that had taken place in Kennet Road and Willoughby Road and it was agreed that the Officer would forward this to the relevant Member.
- Members were concerned that on occasion, residents were being refused the right to off load items at the Chalvey Refuse Site. In response the Strategic Director explained that a policy had been introduced 2 years previously to prevent commercial organisations from using the site to off-load their waste as this presented an enormous cost to the Council.
- A Member asked whether Wardens had powers to arrest and the Officer replied that this was not the case.
- A Member asked whether it was the responsibility of a Warden to personally remove litter. The Officer advised that if the amount of litter was minimal then the Warden would be expected to place the litter in a bag and take it to the tip. Wardens would be required wherever possible to look through fly tipping to establish evidence of the identity of the person who had left the rubbish and take photographic evidence. Members were reminded that since June Wardens had the power to serve fixed penalty notices.
- A Member was concerned regarding the illegal parking of cars on pavements and the Officer advised that it was anticipated that powers would be available in the near future to remove such vehicles.
- There was a concern that some gardens were unkempt and this encouraged rat infestation. The Officer was asked what measures she had taken to enforce the tidiness of such gardens and the Officer advised that a leaflet had been produced explaining the risk of infections etc that could be caused by rat infestation. It was hoped that talks could be held within schools to educate children.

(N.B: The meeting adjourned at 7.55 p.m. and reconvened at 8.00 p.m.)

- A Co-opted Member asked whether the surveillance cameras used were mobile and whether residents could request that they were placed in a certain location. The Officer advised that the cameras were mainly left in place for several months because there was a cost involved in moving them. The decision to place a camera in a certain location was often made having regard to feedback from members of the public.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted and that details of Wardens names be circulated to Members.
- (b) That the Officer consider further ways to educate members of the public on keeping gardens tidy to prevent rat infestations.

16. Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the South East Plan

The Head of Planning and Strategic Policy outlined a report, informing Members of the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the South East Plan and seeking comments to the Council's list of observations.

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The Officer highlighted that the housing element of the Plan recommended that the overall amount of housing within the south east region should be increased from 28,904 a year to 32,000 a year over the period of 2006/2026. The Secretary of State had increased this to 33,125 per year. She had rejected the recommendation of the Independent Panel that there should be a strategic development area south-west of Reading because of objections from the Environment Agency about flooding. As a result, the 10,000 dwellings that had been allocated to West Berkshire to accommodate this had been dropped.

The Secretary of State had recommended that the housing allocation in Slough should be increased by a further 600 on top of the extra 1,000 already recommended by the Independent Panel. Slough's allocation was therefore 6,300 over the 20 year period – 315 per annum. Slough's allocation should be seen in the context of the other Berkshire districts as follows:-

Average Dwellings Per Year

Bracknell Forest	-	639
Reading	-	611
Slough	-	315
West Berkshire	-	525
Windsor & Maidenhead	-	346
Wokingham	-	623

The proposed increase for Slough was not unexpected given the current high building rate and the fact that sites had already been identified in the Borough for 6,800 dwellings.

Officers had no major concerns about the Secretary of State's other proposed changes and it was recommended that Cabinet be requested to support the proposed response.

Members considered the report and raised a number of comments/questions as follows:

- A Member asked why other Authorities had been allocated a higher number of dwellings and was advised that Slough was constrained due to the lack of development land and the majority of future building would be on green field sites. At present 500 dwellings on average were built each year but in future years the supply of building land would dry up.
- A Member asked what the definition of 'Urban Extension' was and was advised that this would mean something major, for example several thousand dwellings on the edge of a town. This would be difficult to promote in Slough as there was no scope in the town's boundaries.
- A Member questioned the current transport provision through Colnbrook and was advised that this would be the subject of a report to a future Scrutiny Panel.

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- The Officer was asked whether private park and ride schemes to the airport would be promoted and was advised that there were no current proposals and a previous scheme near Junction 5 of M4 that had been considered had not come to fruition. It was suggested that this could be considered when the LTP was reviewed.
- A Member asked how the Council's housing waiting list of approximately 4,000 could be met from the 315 dwellings. The Officer advised that this was a minimum figure and more houses could be built subject to the availability of land. The Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal advised that there were still some large sites in the town available including the Town Hall.
- A Member commented that it would be easy to achieve the number of 'dwellings' but if these were flats then there would be inadequate provision for family homes that were needed. The Officer advised that he was trying to promote as much family housing as possible and this would be located outside of the town centre.
- A Member considered that the importance of proposal 'G' within Appendix 'A' should be emphasised (the right to make appropriate representations including a third runway at Heathrow).

Resolved - That the report be noted and that the Cabinet be advised that the Panel endorses the proposed response to the Secretary of State regarding the proposed changes to the South East Plan.

17. Future Work Programme

The future programme was noted and updated as follows:

- 27th October 2008- An update report by People 1st on Rent Collection.
- Unprogrammed - Report on leasehold service charges covering the collection and amount of charge and standard of work done to communal areas.

A Member asked why the Northern Road/Cumberland Avenue Traffic Management Scheme had not been included on the agenda. The Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal advised that a complete new scheme would be delivered in January (following consultation) and a meeting would be held the following week to consider this.

18. Date of Next Meeting- Monday 27th October 2008

The date of the next meeting was noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 8.55 p.m.)