

Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 16th September, 2008.

Present:- Councillors Walsh (Chair), Coad, Davis, Grewal, Jenkins, Latif Khan, Long, Pabbi and Qureshi.

Present under Procedure

Rule 30:- Councillors Parmar, Plimmer & Swindlehurst.

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

That Councillor Coad be elected Vice-Chair for the 2008/09 municipal year.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the last Community and Cultural Services meeting held on Wednesday, 2nd June, 2008 were approved as a correct record.

4. Member Call-In: Music and Dance in the Park

At the Chair's discretion item 10 from the published agenda was considered before the other scheduled items.

The Member call-in was introduced and the proposed issues, relating to the Music and Dance in the Park event, were outlined, including the concern that a financial loss had been made. Other issues included the concerns that Members had not been consulted in the choices relating to the event, particularly with reference to the suitability of the type of music chosen, the publicity for the event and other issues associated with the preparation of the event. A query as to what can be learnt from other Authorities who have hosted similar events, such as the London Borough of Ealing, was also identified.

Members raised several points in the subsequent discussion, including:-

- That the event was a good idea and in keeping with the drive to generate greater levels of local pride in Slough.
- That in planning the next event consideration should be taken of the expected weather when choosing a suitable month.
- A Member also queried, given the financial loss from the event, the degree to which per head the event was subsidised by the Council.

Resolved - That a report on the issues identified in the call-in be submitted to the Panel at its next meeting on the 29th October, 2008.

5. Community Facilities Strategy

A report on the development of a new community facilities strategy was presented to the Panel by the Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services. The Panel was informed that the report will be considered by the Cabinet at its next meeting on the 24th September, 2008.

The report was based on a workshop held with Members, in which data from an audit of community facilities in Slough was considered. The report outlined the development of a strategy, aimed at providing a range of high quality community facilities (buildings, parks, open spaces, allotments etc) for people in Slough. Members were told that a large number of buildings used throughout Slough needed repair in order to be fit for purpose and that a coherent policy of use for these buildings needed to be developed. Buildings are required to support a range of community activities such as sports, leisure and Adult and Community Learning. A Hub and Spoke approach was detailed, noting that facilities would be needed at local levels as well as essential levels to suitably support the range of community activities.

The report further noted that links to other strategies, such as neighbourhood management and play strategies could be developed in the exploration of the relevant issues and public opinion.

The Officer welcomed Member input, particularly into the question of how to engage the public.

Several points were raised in the discussion including that:-

- Stronger facilities are needed at a local level but that such facilities can act as a means to unite Slough. For example the use of music centres for people.
- Community facilities need to be easily accessible to older and young people.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that it be recommended to Cabinet that the community facility strategy be developed in line with the proposals and next steps as set out in the report.

6. Neighbourhood Management

A report was presented to Members by the Strategic Director of Green and Built Environment on the progress made in developing a strategy for Neighbourhood Working and the proposed approach to the continued development of the strategy. Members were informed that this report would be put to Cabinet at the next meeting on the 24th September, 2008.

The report outlined the existing Neighbourhood Working arrangements and identified several points for development including the need to create a more co-ordinated approach to ensure effective communication and cohesion of service delivery. Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) were highlighted as a means to begin this development through the implementation of a variety of measures such as establishing and strengthening links between NAGs and other Working Groups, local action groups, Members and Officers. The pilot project to test the suggested approach was described in the report. Using the existing structure, it was intended that a greater understanding of community needs could be developed and that the NAGs could extend their community policing role into a community management role. Intensive community engagement, Local Community Charters and long term action plans for areas were also considered as a necessary means to propel development.

A Member queried the current purpose of NAGs and informed the Panel that they had been told that Councillors were not to be involved in these Groups. Another Member noted that they had been told similarly. The Officer explained that NAGs were run by the Police and were not public meetings, however, in developing the roles of the NAGs they did want to strengthen Members input and that this was a new opportunity for Members to become involved.

Several other points were raised by Members in the subsequent discussion including:-

- That Councillors should be notified and/or invited to the meetings of the NAGs.
- That each Ward has different problems and issues and that the idea of using the structure to identify and resolve these issues was good.
- A Member asked which areas would be covered by the pilot schemes and was told by the Officer that Colnbrook and Baylis had been recommended. A Member noted that if these were the recommended areas then these were probably the most suitable.

At 7.15 p.m. the Chair called a break, in consideration of those Members observing Ramadan. The meeting was resumed at 7.30 p.m.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that the proposals as set out in the report be recommended to Cabinet.

It was agreed that a joint meeting with the Neighbourhood and Renewal Scrutiny Panel should be arranged to consider the progress of the scheme further.

7. Refocusing Food Safety Enforcement Priorities

A presentation was given to the Panel on the refocusing of food safety enforcement priorities, noting that 60% of businesses in Slough were broadly

compliant with legal requirements and that the aim was to increase this figure by 10% by focusing on non-compliant businesses. However, as a range of new interventions were to be used, the Officer noted that this may or may not have been an ambitious target. These new interventions would focus on Officers on the ground and the relationship they develop with those businesses failing to comply, in particular, by identifying the reasons behind the lack of compliance. Alongside these actions, the drive to support healthier options was also noted as significant.

The report detailed the impetus behind the refocusing of food safety enforcement priorities, namely regulatory reform, a new local performance framework and the revised Food Law Code of Practice. The Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 focused the inspection of food businesses on those which are non-compliant and introduced the primary authority principle, which places a responsibility upon Local Authorities to provide advice and support to local businesses that may operate in more than one Local Authority area. Further guidance on this from the local Better Regulation Office is expected in the near future. The Food Standards Agency revised Food Law Code of Practice introduced a suite of interventions aimed at non-compliant businesses. The report proposed that a lighter touch be adopted toward compliant businesses to ensure that adequate resources are available for interventions to be targeted at poor performers.

Members raised a number of key points including:-

- A Member queried how inspections were initiated and was informed by the Officer that regular inspections took place. However, if a complaint was to be received then an inspection would take place within two days.
- Members also sought clarification on how sub-standard businesses would be targeted under the new measures. The Officer explained that a balanced approach would be taken and that the reasons why businesses were failing to comply with regulations would largely determine the subsequent action taken. Education and training would be used where a business lacked appropriate understanding, knowledge or skills. In cases where a lack of compliance was a result of wilful negligence then punitive action would be taken.
- A Member raised the concern that the Primary Authority Principle might be considered a double edged sword and queried whether the benefits such as the additional revenue that might be generated by becoming a primary Authority outweighed the additional responsibilities and work that would also be generated. The Officer noted that it was a possibility but details for the Primary Authority Principle were still emerging and more information would become available soon.
- The concern was also raised that the advice and support service offered by a Primary Authority would not necessarily be needed by leading businesses. The Officer noted however, that the benefit to the companies lay in the fact that as a Primary Authority the advice and support offered

would be both in depth and would override that of other Authorities throughout the country and therefore the company would benefit from receiving consistent advice and information from one source.

Resolved - That the proposals in the report be recommended to Cabinet and that a report updating the Panel on the situation relating to the Primary Authority principle be submitted to the Panel at a future meeting.

8. Smokefree Enforcement Strategy

A presentation was delivered by the Senior Environmental Health Officer to the Panel on the smokefree enforcement strategy, highlighting the proactive and supportive approach the regulatory enforcement unit had taken and would continue to take. Actions under this strategy included inspections, routine checks and out of hours checks and support and promotion in the form of advice, leaflets, stickers, free smoking bins and also press releases. The report similarly outlined the action taken by the Local Authority in the enforcement of the Health Act 2006 and July, 2007 and noted the high level of legal compliance that had been encountered.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to the presentation and report. Clarification was sought on the response that the regulatory enforcement unit had received from the public. The Panel was informed that the majority of people and businesses were supportive and in particular that attitudes had quickly become far more amenable to the new regulations. The Officer also noted, in response to a question, that while a great deal of time and man hours had been dedicated to enforcing the new regulations at their instigation, the need for this had greatly decreased and now inspections of sites had largely been merged with the inspections held for other or generic purposes.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

9. Customer Service Centre Action Plan Update

The Head of Customer Services presented a report updating the Panel on the progress of the Customer Service Centre, which included an action plan for future improvement. During the course of the following discussion Members were informed by the Officer that several points on the action plan were dependent on IT upgrades, one occurring at the end of October and the other in January, 2009. Local access points were also discussed and Members were informed that these were working well and that efforts were being made to publicise these more. Additionally, at those local access points where usage was high, staffing levels and opening hours were adapted accordingly.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

10. Greening Slough Motion

The Panel was requested to consider the Greening Slough motion passed at the Council meeting of the 22nd July, 2008 and decide whether it wished to undertake scrutiny of the issue. The Strategic Director of Green and Built Environment noted that the issue was expansive and advised that reports relating to aspects of this issue would be presented to the Panel at future meetings regardless of the Panel's decision concerning the motion. The Panel agreed that addressing the issue on a subject by subject basis would allow the issue to be explored at greater depth.

Resolved - That the issues highlighted in the Greening Slough motion would not be considered by the Community Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel.

11. Forward Work Programme

The items on the forward work programme were noted and it was agreed that the Member call-in discussed earlier in the meeting be added to the items for the next meeting on the 29th October, 2008.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 8.40 p.m.)