

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Extraordinary Meeting held on Tuesday, 20th December, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bedi, N Holledge (until 8.20pm), Sadiq, A Sandhu, R Sandhu and Usmani

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ajaib, Chahal, Chaudhry, Morris, Smith, Munawar and Hussain

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Parmar

PART I

37. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bedi declared an interest in respect of Agenda Items 4 - Draft Housing Strategy, and 5 - Homelessness in Slough, in that she was employed by Radian Group Housing Association.

Councillor Morris, present under Rule 30, declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 4 - Draft Housing Strategy, in that he was a Council tenant.

In relation to Agenda Item 5 - Homelessness in Slough, Councillor Morris declared that he had an interest of a sensitive nature and that the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services had been duly notified.

38. Scrutiny Panel Membership

A report was received notifying the Committee that the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel had appointed a representative of Slough Youth Parliament, Hamzah Ahmed, as a non-voting co-opted member.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, set out in Part 4.5 of the Constitution, enabled the Panel to appoint up to six non-voting co-optees and required the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be informed of any such appointments. At its meeting on 8th December 2016, the Panel agreed to appoint a representative of Slough Youth Parliament on an ongoing basis with Hamzah Ahmed, the current President, appointed initially as their representative. The appointment would increase the diversity of viewpoints in the Panel's membership and increase engagement with young people in the borough.

Resolved – That the appointment of a representative of Slough Youth Parliament, Hamzah Ahmed, as a non-voting co-opted member to the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel be noted.

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39. Five Year Plan 2017-2021

The Head of Policy, Partnerships & Programmes introduced a report that sought the Committee's comments on the draft Five Year Plan 2017-2021 prior to it being submitted to Cabinet on 23rd January 2017.

The Plan was reviewed annually and the draft had been developed with Commissioners to reflect their priority to 'put people first'. Members were informed that the priority outcomes, detailed in paragraph 5.5 of the report, had been streamlined from eight to five by combining areas of overlap or duplication. There would be a new format for performance reporting, focused on a high level set of measures to more clearly demonstrate the progress being made on each of the outcomes. Members' views were sought on the priorities, reporting framework and the proposed allocation of the revised outcomes across the Committee and three Panels.

Members discussed community engagement and asked what more would be done to strengthen partnership working. It was noted that improved engagement had been identified by the Council leadership and Slough Wellbeing Board as a key issue and work was underway with Council departments, external partners, community organisations and others to address shared priorities. The summary outcome plans in section 5 of the draft set out the partners expected to contribute to each outcome.

Whilst recognising that the document was a high level strategic plan, Members highlighted a number of areas where further detail and clarity could be provided such as the actions being taken on homelessness and children with Special Educational Needs. The Committee emphasised the importance of developing a clear set of Key Performance Indicators to demonstrate how each outcome would be achieved and how progress would be measured. The Plan also needed to be realistic, demonstrate the progress made to date and be Slough focused. The final plan would include more examples and case studies to provide further clarity on these issues. Resources would be primarily allocated to achieve the outcomes in the plan and it was therefore crucial to ensure the strategic priorities were properly aligned to the Council's budget strategy.

The proposed allocation of outcomes between the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Panels was considered and agreed as follows:

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

- Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit.
- Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for our residents.

Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

- Our residents will have access to good quality homes.

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Health Scrutiny Panel

- Our people will become healthier and will manage their own health, care and support needs.

Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

- Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives.

The Committee welcomed the opportunity to shape and influence the plan at a draft stage prior to it being considered by Cabinet and full Council in January 2017 and requested that the comments made during the discussion be reflected in the next draft of the plan.

Resolved –

- (a) That details of the draft Five Year Plan 2017-2021 be noted.
- (b) That the allocation of outcomes across the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Panels be agreed as set out in paragraph 5.11 of the report.

40. Draft Housing Strategy For Slough

The Interim Strategic Director of Regeneration, Housing & Resources introduced a report on the draft new Housing Strategy for Slough for the period 2016 to 2021. A consultation process on the draft was underway and the Committee was invited to provide comments to shape the strategy prior to Cabinet approval in early 2017.

The draft strategy set out the priorities, opportunities and challenges for housing in Slough over the next five years, however, it also took a longer term view and had been developed alongside the preparatory work for the Local Plan to support the growth and development of the town over the next twenty years. Members noted that the strategy had five key themes and was supported by a detailed Action Plan. The Strategic Director summarised the key aspects of the strategy:

- Theme 1: New Housing Supply – the Council would take a proactive approach to deliver the new homes required to meet the forecast population and economic growth of the town by enabling 927 new housing units per year in line with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The Council would commit to directly delivering 200 units per year and a range of measures were proposed to provide more affordable homes.
- Theme 2: Private Rented Sector – a quarter of families rented their home from a private landlord and the strategy included proposals to encourage better housing standards. These included supporting responsible landlords, undertaking rigorous enforcement against the

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minority of rogue landlords and a feasibility study into a borough-wide Landlord Registration Scheme.

- Theme 3: Council Homes – the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was in a stable position in the short term with major investment plans totalling £140m in both existing and new homes in the coming years. However, there were significant medium term threats and uncertainties arising from changes to Government policy and the strategy set out plans for an updated 30 year HRA Business Plan by March 2017 and a formal asset management review and option appraisal of the Council's housing stock by December 2017.
- Theme 4: Homelessness and Housing Need – housing was unaffordable for an increasing number of people. There were more than 300 households in temporary accommodation which had significantly increased in the past two years. Actions included a Preventing Homelessness Strategy and a review of both the Allocations Scheme and the arrangements for rough sleepers during periods of cold weather. The proposed Subsidiary Housing Company would also seek to acquire properties to reduce pressure on temporary accommodation and end the use of Bed & Breakfast for families with children.
- Theme 5: Special Needs and Vulnerable Groups – more specialist accommodation would be required as the number of older people in Slough increased and close working with adult social care and the Children's Trust would be required to provide the various types of accommodation required for vulnerable people.

The Committee welcomed the development of the new strategy and discussed the consultation arrangements and the monitoring of the strategy. It proposed a RAG rating report be developed on each of the five themes to demonstrate the progress being made against the stated actions.

Councillors Morris and Smith addressed the Committee under Rule 30. Councillor Morris broadly welcomed the strategy and asked a number of specific questions including HRA accounting practice; the use of HRA resources in the proposed new subsidiary housing companies; and the associated infrastructure such as school places and transport required to support communities experiencing population and housing growth. The Strategic Director responded that the funding for the housing companies was from the Council's capital programme, not the HRA. Developing the Housing Strategy alongside the emerging Local Plan was an opportunity to take a coherent approach on the provision of infrastructure required to support growth.

Councillor Smith asked about the homelessness strategy and potential impacts of the closure of The Foyer. Officers highlighted that the strategy sought to prevent homelessness in the first instance, for example by brokering arrangements between tenants and landlords and focusing direct support on

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priority groups. The decision to close The Foyer was explained, primarily due to the fact many rooms were not in use, and it was stated that the young person's hostel had vacancies available.

The Committee raised a number of other issues which are summarised as follows:

- Affordable housing – it was noted that there was a 40% target for affordable housing provision in new developments in Slough. The pressures caused by London Boroughs placing families into accommodation in Slough were recognised and whilst there was a duty to notify the authority of such placements, it did not include information on the needs for education or social care services which was a problem.
- Key workers – no specific targets had yet been set on the number of the new properties to be made available to key workers and it was important to have clarity on the definition. This work would be undertaken as part of the action planning process.
- Landlord / tenant relationships – several issues were raised and clarification was sought on the turnaround period for Council properties. It was agreed that details regarding the number of void properties and turnaround period when re-letting properties be circulated to the Committee. The Council sometimes had limited influence on private landlords, however, it was intended that the potential Landlord Registration Scheme could help improve housing standards and tenant relationships in Slough.
- Under-occupation – the Committee asked what more could be done to address the under-occupancy of Council homes to provide more properties for families. The strategy referred to the issue, although the provision of lifetime tenancies meant it was very difficult to move tenants to more suitable accommodation. A Member commented that the proposed differential rent policy would also deter people moving, however, it was noted that as this policy was only proposed for new builds it would affect a relatively small number of properties. It was also recognised that the Council's relationship with Housing Associations needed to be re-invigorated to help ensure people were housed in the most suitable accommodation.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee noted the consultation draft of the new Housing Strategy and agreed to receive six monthly updates focused on one of the five themes of the strategy, starting with Theme 1 in July 2017.

Resolved –

- (a) That details of the draft Housing Strategy be noted.

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- (b) That the Committee receive an update on progress of the strategy on a bi-annual basis.
- (c) That the Committee consider details of Theme 1: Supply of New Homes at its meeting in July 2017.

(Councillor Holledge left the meeting at this point)

41. Homelessness in Slough

The Committee received a presentation on Homelessness in Slough from the Housing Demand Manager, Temporary Accommodation Manager and Lettings & Voids Manager. Members also welcomed Darren McDermott from Shelter and Maggie McGuire from Slough Homeless Our Concern (SHOC), who had been invited to the meeting to provide their knowledge and insight on homelessness.

The presentation covered the statutory duties of the Council relating to homelessness and the statutory tests to determine eligibility for support; statistics on statutory homeless and temporary accommodation; an overview of the policy context and actions the Council was taking; and information on the position regarding rough sleepers. There had been a significant increase in the past two years both in terms of the number of 'agreed' homeless decisions issued and the number of households in temporary accommodation from 150 in 2014/15 to more than 300 in 2016/17. The Committee noted the range of measures undertaken to address the issue and the Council had a target that no families would be placed in bed & breakfast accommodation by March 2017.

The official number of rough sleepers estimated in Slough was 25 in 2016. This figure had increased in each of the last three years, but remained below the estimate of 30 in 2011. The range of support that the Council was putting in place for rough sleepers was noted and the focus in the new Housing Strategy on preventing homelessness was highlighted. The Committee also noted a wide range of current issues including the impact of London placements into housing in Slough, welfare reforms and the demands on social housing.

Councillor Strutton had submitted a number of Members' Questions on homelessness, which had been responded to by the Head of Housing. The Chair agreed they could be tabled given their relevance to the agenda item and the questions and answers were noted by the Committee.

Mr McDermott and Ms McGuire provided Members with their perspective on the homelessness position in the borough. It was stated that there was a major housing affordability problem in Slough due to the rapid increase in house prices and the associated impacts on the local housing market. Demand outstripped the supply of new homes and the standard of many properties, particularly HMOs, was poor. Organisations such as Shelter and SHOC sought to work with partners, including the Council, to prevent

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homelessness and support clients, however, there was rising demand on services. The pressures on resources meant that partnership working was essential, not only in terms of service provision but also in seeking the input of voluntary and community sector partners to help shape the housing strategy and allocations policy. The importance of providing day services for homeless people was emphasised. A Member asked about the accuracy of the figures provided on the number of rough sleepers and it was responded that the figures were estimates and it was recognised that the actual figure could be higher.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Morris acknowledged some of the good work being done in Slough to address homelessness but he highlighted a number of systemic faults and emphasised the importance of organisations taking ownership to support individuals in need. Councillor Smith also spoke under Rule 30 and drew attention to the wider problem of rough sleeping in vehicles, parks and other places outside of the town centre which in his view needed greater attention.

The Committee discussed the complex and difficult choices facing the Council in making the savings required to set a balanced revenue budget in February at the same time as providing housing and related services which met the needs of vulnerable people. A significant amount of work was being undertaken on both reviews of key housing policies and the budget which the Committee would scrutinise early in 2017.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee noted the presentation and thanked officers and guests for their contribution to the meeting.

Resolved – That details of the presentation be noted.

42. Date of Next Meeting - 12 January 2017

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12th January, 2017.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.25 pm)