

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 18th April 2017

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WARD(S): Central (Business Improvement District)
All (Homelessness)

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Ajaib –
Commissioner for Housing and Urban Renewal

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – **TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT – BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT** **AND HOMELESSNESS**

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to consider the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (9th March 2017) and the recommendations of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (4th April 2017).

2. Matters for resolution from Cabinet

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee made the following recommendation at its meeting on 9th March 2017:

- That the Cabinet support the exploration of a Business Improvement District for Slough as the best possible solution for revitalising Slough town centre.

The Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel made the following recommendations at its meeting on 4th April 2017:

- That the Cabinet lobby for the Local Housing Allowance in Slough to be adjusted to reflect its similarity with London Boroughs.
- That the Cabinet write to London Boroughs to reinforce the need for them to fulfil their obligations towards homeless people for whom they are responsible

3 The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Corporate Plan

3a Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) Priorities

- Economy and Skills: The proposed Business Improvement District (BID) will provide impetus to the local economy and improve the opportunities for local residents to gain employable skills.
- Increasing life expectancy by focusing on inequalities: Homelessness has a significant negative impact on life expectancy.
- Regeneration and Environment: The BID will bolster the regeneration of Slough town centre.

- Housing: By improving the support offered to the homeless, Slough will increase the quality of its housing offer for residents.

3b Five Year Plan Outcomes

- Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives: The increased job opportunities offered by the BID will improve life chances for local young people entering the job market.
- Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit: The BID will improve the living environment, increasing the attractiveness of Slough to those currently outside the borough.
- Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for our residents: The BID's central aim is to support all aspects of this outcome.
- Our residents will have access to good quality homes: The Housing Service is committed to limiting homelessness and offering those affected a route to permanent and fitting solution.

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

The majority of the actions outlined in this report are funded via the Economic Development team budget. The cost of the scoping exercise and BID feasibility study requested in this paper is estimated at £5,000. The BID will then require ongoing expenditure for the mechanics required for the collection of fees, but the finances will be raised by the companies forming the BID.

(b) Risk Management

Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)	Recommendation
Lack of funding to deliver identified actions for town centre improvements	Explore sponsorship and bid opportunities for external funding	The Council to consider allocating capital funding for town centre improvements
Potential lack of viability for a Business Improvement District for Slough	Town centre management team in collaboration with town centre stakeholders including the council to devise effective town centre improvement plans	The Council to enter into discussions with the new owner of The Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres to help change the image of the High Street
Contributors to the BID rejecting the BID	Once in place a bid can only be rejected via a ballot every 5 years	That we ensure through effective risk management and partnership working that the BID is successful in delivering its ambitions according to the business plan

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no legal or Human Rights Act implications relating to the content of this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

It is not necessary to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment at this stage. However should any actions require an assessment, this exercise will be carried out when necessary according to Slough Borough Council's rules and guidelines.

5 Supporting Information

5.1 At its meeting on 9th March 2017, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) took an item on the management of Slough town centre. This item reported on a range of matters, such as:

- **The Slough Town Centre Partnership** – this had been formed after engagement with local businesses. Incorporating representatives of the public, private and voluntary / community sectors, its central objective is the formation of a clean, attractive, safe and accessible town centre.
- **Town centre improvements** – a 2016 survey highlighted the perceptions of visitors to Slough town centre. Key findings were that improvements to the appearance of the town centre, the range of shops available and more options for evening activities would encourage 65% of respondents to visit Slough town centre more frequently.
- **Marketing for Slough** – in order to maximise its audience, a variety of means (e.g. an app, website, Wi-Fi across Slough town centre) were being explored to disseminate promotional campaigns. In addition, open air events in the High Street were being explored as a means of gathering publicity and increasing footfall.
- **The redevelopment of Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres** – given the recent announcements on the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, whilst the exact details of the plans were not clear, the potential for transformation was clear. A planning application was currently likely to be submitted in mid 2018.
- **Evening / night time economy** – with recent surveys having a high percentage of respondents stating that they do not visit Slough town centre in the evening (59%) and an even higher number stating they would not recommend it as an evening destination (94%), the potential for improvement is clear. Slough Borough Council was aiming to gain Purple Flag accreditation through offering a diverse range of night time activities in Slough.

Business Improvement Districts

5.2 BIDs are business led partnerships which are created through a ballot process to deliver additional services to local businesses. They are used to improve the local trading environment, and require businesses to pay a levy in addition to standard business rates. These funds are then used to develop projects which will benefit the businesses within the BID area. There is no limit on the extent of the projects provided within the BID; there is only the minimum requirement that a BID offer something beyond the standard provision of the local authority. BIDs last for 5 years if they are created; at the end of this, they cease and the ballot process outlined in Section 5.3 is required again.

- 5.3 The process for the creation of a BID is that the proposer is required to develop a proposal and submit this to the local authority, along with a business plan. This will set out the services to be provided and the size and scope of the BID. It will also set out who will be liable to the levy, the size of that levy and the means by which the levy was calculated. The businesses subject to the levy then vote in a ballot, which decides whether the ballot goes ahead. Should the ballot succeed, then all businesses within the BID (regardless of how they voted) will be subject to the levy. The standard rate of the levy is between 1 – 4% of the rateable value of the business; there is also room for relief for some businesses (e.g. charities). Finally, there is the option of a banded system, whereby businesses group together and pay a levy according to their combined rateable value.
- 5.4 Examples of BIDs can be found in London. Specifically, the Camden BID (Camden Town Unlimited, www.camdentownunlimited.com) has been in operation for over a decade. As this timeframe suggests, it has been a success and welcomed by local businesses; amongst the benefits cited by businesses are increased footfall, better staff retention, economies of scale as joint procurement has decreased infrastructure costs and improved marketing of the overall area. The South Bank BID (www.southbankbid.co.uk) started in 2014, and has assisted with improving the local environment (e.g. graffiti removal, street cleaning, antisocial behaviour) in area with a large amount of visitors and much pressure on the local facilities.
- 5.5 At the OSC meeting, the Committee considered the possibility of the BID and its potential impact on the above points. As a recognised model for stakeholder engagement (specifically businesses) it offered a possible solution to meeting the diverse needs of residents, employees, shoppers and visitors. A BID would then invest in its local area by delivering projects and services against an agreed business plan that would be designed to provide benefits to those who pay first and foremost whilst contributing to the wider community.
- 5.6 Should Cabinet decide to explore the establishment of a BID, an expert place making consultancy would need to be appointed in order to carry out a scoping exercise and feasibility study. Should a BID proposal be deemed viable, it will be produced followed by the development and implementation stages. It was envisaged the scoping exercise would be undertaken in late 2017 if Cabinet approves the proposal.

Homelessness

- 5.7 At its meeting on 4th April, the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (NCS Scrutiny Panel) took an agenda item on homelessness. This presented the Panel with a comprehensive overview of the policy on the issue, the issues facing the service in Slough and the long term aspirations for the service in improving the outcomes for users.
- 5.8 As part of this discussion, members took an interest in the issue of Slough's housing market. Homelessness has increased at a rate which appears to be very closely connected to the increased prices in the local housing market. Influences such as Crossrail, Heathrow expansion and the availability of skilled work have led to rapid inflation in rents and house values. This has left those who are not benefitting from these factors in a more vulnerable position.
- 5.9 However, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has not risen in line with this since its introduction. This has created a gap between the LHA rate in Slough and median rent values, which has been calculated to be at the following levels:

- One bedroom properties: £293.50 per month.
- Two bedroom properties: £434.68 per month.
- Three bedroom properties: £463.81 per month.
- Four bedroom properties: £200.81 per month.

5.10 Given this, the NCS Scrutiny Panel felt strongly that Slough's position should receive consideration from Government. By many indicators, Slough should be considered as having a situation which is comparable with London Boroughs. These receive special weighting and consideration in the calculation of their LHAs; Slough does not. As a result, the NCS Scrutiny Panel called for Cabinet to lobby Government for their position to be taken into consideration in calculating the LHA.

5.11 The NCS Scrutiny Panel also expressed concerns that neighbouring Boroughs were using landlords in Slough as a method for housing their homeless populations. This was placing increased stress on Slough's limited resources; in addition, after 6 months those in receipt of local support could claim to have created a connection with the area which could lead to this Council being placed under an obligation to provide them with accommodation. As a result, the NCS Scrutiny Panel made its second recommendation, reinforcing the message to nearby London Boroughs that they had a duty to offer adequate and sufficient housing to those affected by homelessness.

6 **Comments of Other Committees**

The BID had not been considered by any other Slough Borough Council committee prior to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th March 2017. The homelessness policy has been discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th December 2016.

7 **Conclusion**

The Cabinet is requested to decide upon recommendations outlined in section 2 and discussed in sections 5.1 – 5.11 of this report.

8 **Appendices**

None

9 **Background Papers**

- '1' - Agenda papers and minutes, Overview and Scrutiny Committee (9th March 2017)
- '2' - Agenda papers, Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (4th April 2017)