

**Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 6th September, 2018.**

**Present:-** Councillors Plenty (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), N Holledge, S Parmar, Rasib, Sabah, A Sandhu and Wright

**Non-Voting Co-Opted Members:** Paul Fuller  
Morris Sless

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillor Nazir

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Shah

**PART 1**

**16. Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Kelly declared his employment by Lynch Hill Primary Academy School.

**17. Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th June 2018**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

**18. Action Progress Report**

**Resolved:** That the action progress report be noted.

**19. Member Questions**

The term 'Additional Preference' (as applied to key workers housing policy) meant, in some cases, that the 5 year residency rule to qualify was waived. However, this was not the case in all instances; Cabinet had approved the overall policy but the details were now being finalised. The final criteria would be confirmed after dialogue with head teachers.

All schools had been contacted for the trial of the key workers policy, with 6 schools responding. This was then narrowed down to 2 schools after discussions around need and the application of the trial. The mechanisms for the policy would be refined in light of the findings of the trial. Another property had recently become available, and schools would be alerted to this.

Head teachers have been given a significant amount of decision making power in the creation of the criteria; however, it had proved hard to establish a universally-accepted consensus. In addition, it should be noted that the properties were owned by James Elliman Homes Ltd and were therefore not social rents.

**Resolved:**

1. That an agenda item on key worker housing be added to the agenda for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019.
2. That an item on fly tipping and CCTV be added to the agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019.
3. That an item for information on Real Time Passenger Information be added to the agenda for 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018.

**20. Five Year Plan - Outcome 4**

A report on regulation of the private rented sector would be taken by Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018. This would seek permission to initiate consultation on licensing standards and related issues (e.g. 'fit and proper person' test and the provision of training on legal issues such as eviction). The Panel agreed to return to this matter later in the Municipal Year.

Best use of public housing stock would include both the use of the 6,200 Council homes currently in existence and work on vacant land or garage sites identified as no longer viable. Osbornes had allocated significant funding to this area and use resources accordingly to maximise their potential. Meanwhile, 500 housing units have been identified for building if central Government approve a bid for resources; this bid would be submitted on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

The Homelessness Strategy was currently in draft form. However, the wider context (as with the national picture) was one where the situation was worsening. Consultants had been appointed to review the area and how Slough could mitigate matters whilst regeneration and the housing market continued to add pressure to Slough's housing situation. Slough Borough Council (SBC) were also determined to work with South Buckinghamshire Council on the necessary but contentious plans to expand into neighbouring areas to the North of the Borough.

A delivery group dedicated to Outcome 4 of the Five Year Plan was holding regular meetings on all matters connected to the outcome.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The Chalvey pilot scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation had not proved to be sustainable. However, relaunching it by applying it across the Borough and with a stronger structure would rectify these matters; this would be discussed by Cabinet as part of its discussion on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Should this be approved, it would become active in the 2019 – 20 Financial Year.
- The proposal to central Government mentioned above could receive funding of up to £100 million. Should this be given the approval to proceed, the majority would be charged at Slough Living Rent rates (around 70% of the market value) with the units to be built by the end of 2022 – 23. Details of the proposal would be circulated to members outside of the meeting.

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- At present, the £2.1 million overspend figure for homelessness was a projection based on present numbers remaining static. It had not yet actually been spent and attempts to improve the situation were being made. Any such overspend would be taken from SBC's reserves.
- The 6,200 properties owned by SBC were a mixture of types of housing. The breakdown of this would be circulated to members outside of the meeting.
- The £140 million investment in housing over 10 years was being funded by SBC.
- Information regarding the numbers of homeless people and households living in Slough who were originally from London is held and maintained by SBC. However, notifications of these cases did not always take place, meaning that such statistics were not 100% accurate.
- A landlord insurance scheme was one potential form of incentive to encourage more people to enter the market. However, SBC would need to continue developing training for landlords; some inherited properties and therefore had little background in the area, and needed to be fully conversant with their legal obligations.
- The profiles and motivations of those who downsized was variable (e.g. elderly residents whose family had moved out, those who wanted to avoid under-occupancy charges). Details of these profiles would be circulated to members outside of the meeting.
- Whilst incentivising downsizing could help ameliorate the situation, the numbers involved may be limited; as a result, it was questionable whether this should become a top priority for the Housing Service.
- A future agenda item should be taken on downsizing. This should address questions such as:
  - What number of properties were presently involved?
  - What number of properties is potentially involved?
  - What incentives could be offered to encourage downsizing?
  - If someone downsized and received a new build, would they have the right to buy?

### **Resolved:**

1. That an item on homelessness be added to the agenda for 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018.
2. That an item on downsizing be added to the agenda for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019.

## **21. Strategic Housing Services - Scrutiny Overview Indicators**

This was the first such report with housing separated from neighbourhood statistics; as a result, the Panel was requested to comment on how future reports should be presented. The information presented on this occasion covered 2017 – 18 and the first 4 months of 2018 – 19. In particular, the Panel was asked to note the pressure on the homelessness service.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Arrears which were written off had a variety of causes (e.g. person involved could not be traced, amount spent on reclaiming money greater than amount reclaimed). Such cases were not written off lightly, and were done in tranches to manage the process rather than as a permanent, on-going process. Arvato managed the matter, and also had to bear in mind matters such as data protection in their work.
- SBC were unsure whether their statistics were in line with national averages. This could be assessed.
- The percentage of tenants whose arrears were written off in receipt of full housing benefits was 47%. The percentage receiving no housing benefit was 20%, with the remaining 33% receiving some housing benefit.
- 11 right to buys had been completed, with another 6 currently in the system. It was intended to replace these to maintain the housing stock although work was needed on this; in total, 38 such properties were intended to cover demand.
- Capital receipts were being used to fund development on small sites.
- James Elliman Homes was wholly owned by SBC and bought homes from the private sector (amongst its other responsibilities). Investment was then made on the purchased properties to make them suitable for future occupiers. £18 million had been spent on this, with a £7 million advance requested from the funding allocated to 2019 – 20. This would be focussed on the homelessness issue, with some properties also available for key workers.
- Some nightly paid rates were £80 per night. However, complexities such as the variations in the length of stay, the time taken to process benefits claims and high level of movement made the situation regarding funding and maintaining records complex.

**Resolved:** That an item on the Home Improvements Agency be added to the agenda for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019.

**22. Forward Work Programme 2018 - 19**

Subject to the additions requested in the previous minutes, the work programme was agreed as taken.

**Resolved:** That the work programme be noted.

**23. Attendance Record 2018 - 19**

**Resolved:** That the attendance record be noted.

**24. Date of Next Meeting - 1st November 2018**

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 7.02 pm and closed at 8.46 pm)