

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 1st November, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), S Parmar, Rasib, Sabah, A Sandhu, Shah (from 6.42pm until 7.25pm) and Wright

Paul Fuller – Residents Panel Board

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor N Holledge

PART 1

25. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were given in relation to the meeting's agenda items.

26. Minutes of the last meeting held on 6th September 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th September 2018 be approved as a correct record.

27. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

28. Member Questions

The responses to the members' questions were circulated. Members noted the answers regarding the Local Plan; whilst they noted their comments on the national picture, they requested that the forthcoming report on the matter make reference to those issues unique to Slough.

Resolved: That the response to the members' questions be noted.

29. Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

The proposals outlined in the report had been taken by Cabinet on 17th September 2018. They were now subject to statutory consultation, which would run for 90 days starting on 2nd November 2018. Officers had also compiled a list of landlords and agents, which would be circulated to the Panel. A page dedicated to the issue would also be on Slough Borough Council's (SBC) website until 31st January 2019. The results of the consultation would be analysed in February 2019 and were scheduled to be reported back to Cabinet on 18th March 2019.

(At this point, Councillor Shah entered the meeting)

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 01.11.18

SBC had analysed its housing stock (which had increased over the last 7 years); of this, 33% was in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). SBC also had a high proportion of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) which tended to be concentrated in specific areas (Chalvey and Central Wards). These properties also reported high levels of anti-social behaviour. Recent legislation had given SBC the ability to ensure that it could take action against landlords operating to low standards. Conditions could be set for each property, with remedies to be sought with ones which continued to experience poor behaviour. In future, all PRS properties would be subject to licensing (not just HMOs); this would also protect the physical state of SBC's housing stock.

Members were asked to encourage constituents to participate in the consultation; the process was detailed and asked over 20 questions regarding the proposals. There would also be 2 focus groups established; 1 for landlords, and 1 for residents and tenants. The central ambition was to design a scheme which improved the quality of the housing stock and the local environment in general.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The Chalvey Pilot had licensed 43 properties out of the overall local stock of over 2,000. It had encountered issues regarding enforcement, but these would be helped with the new legislation. All landlords would be given the chance to solve any issues, but SBC would have the power to levy a £30,000 fine for non-compliance.
- Sound basic standards were very much part of the proposed licensing scheme. This included electrical checks and gas safety certification.
- The proposals would lead to a culture change and also offered an online application system for landlords. The relevant team had also been expanded from 2 dedicated officers to 7; the increased level of collection would render this cost neutral.
- Mandatory licensing was proposed to be £950; additional licensing would be £750 and selective licensing £650. The mandatory scheme had been agreed, with the other 2 subject to consultation. Other options around licences would be offered to Cabinet; it was intended for licences to last 5 years, with landlords whose reputation was less sure offered 1 year.
- The picture regarding the ownership of HMOs was unclear; however SBC was aware that there were numerous portfolio landlords in Slough, who owned 2 – 4 properties in most cases.
- The correlation between HMOs and anti-social behaviour was relatively clear. Figures on this would be included in the consultation and would be on the SBC website page.
- Members would be invited to a briefing on licensing proposals.
- SBC could support landlords who did not want to go through licensing, although had to be clear on the level of commitment it could make regarding property management on their behalf.
- Licensing would be used to help ensure that landlords were regularly inspecting their properties. Ultimately, landlords had to accept that their

properties were the resources used in their business and should be managed with appropriate care.

- Initially, SBC would prioritise those areas with the highest levels of HMOs. Owners would be encouraged to come forward and then directed to a streamlined application process. Councillors representing Chalvey and Central Wards would be targeted for communications as part of this and also invited to the focus groups. Every resident in these 2 wards would receive communication on the matter.
- Refuse collection facilities would be reviewed to try and limit fly tipping by residents. However, SBC would support landlords to resolve any cases of such behaviour where they remained.
- Any fines paid would be spent within the Enforcement Service. Rogue landlords could be banned, prosecuted and convicted as appropriate; however, the costs of such procedures were high so would have to form part of any such consideration (as would the powerful disincentive impact of punitive measures on other landlords operating to low standards).
- Language issues with local residents were being discussed with the Communications Team.
- Should tenants choose to undertake work on the behalf of their landlords, they would have to follow a very prescriptive process (e.g. notify SBC, take the best offer from the service providers approached). This could then be deducted from their rent.
- A licence had to provide a 24 hour contact, the maximum number of tenants allowed in the property and other details. However, SBC was legally prevented from requesting photo ID as part of this.

(At this point, Councillor Shah left the meeting)

- The multi storey flats approved for the Octagon site would be part of this licensing regime.

Resolved: That an update on the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation be taken by the Panel in November 2019.

30. Homelessness in Slough

Homelessness was increasingly an issue as PRS properties became unaffordable for many local residents. The number of households recorded as homeless had decreased recently but the situation remained difficult to manage. The waiting time for PRS housing was 5 years with the additional complexity of finding a property with the appropriate number of bedrooms. Whilst the team's budget allowed them to buy 40 properties in most years (and 60 this year) this only ameliorated the matter rather than resolve it outright.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 included a 56 day prevention phase and a 56 day relief period before SBC entered the statutory duty phase. In 2017 – 18, 506 households had approached SBC as homeless; in the first half of 2018 – 18 this rose to 810, demonstrating the impact of this legislation. In

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 01.11.18

addition, London Boroughs were discharging their obligations into Slough through the powers provided in the Localism Act 2011. Members were presented with a case of a family of 9 which had been sent to Slough for housing; a failure to resolve this case by SBC would cause a significant level of expenditure to be required.

The Homelessness Plan was currently being compiled, and would be circulated to members when available. The Panel would then decide how to progress with the issue.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- SBC offered 2 year assured tenancies where appropriate; a high proportion of these originated from London. In cases where other local authorities discharged their responsibilities in Slough, SBC did not have the power to stop them.
- Members would be provided with a breakdown of the number of bedrooms required by the new cases reporting as homeless.
- The voluntary relocation scheme was receiving applicants.
- Approximately 25% of households registered as homeless had non-Slough addresses in the last 5 years.
- James Elliman Homes were wholly owned by SBC. Officers had requested that an element of next year's funding be brought forward to assist with the current situation.
- £260,000 had been allocated to the issue of rough sleepers, with outreach workers providing the relevant service. A bid had also been submitted for the service in 2019 – 20. A night shelter would be offering a year-round service in the near future, which would also be visited by a local GP. The service also worked on related issues (e.g. drug addiction) and providing a permanent pathway out of rough sleeping.
- Provision for rough sleeping was being mapped to ensure that SBC was making the best possible use of the voluntary sector and other partners. A partnership meeting would be held with the voluntary sector in the near future.
- There were approximately 65 rough sleepers in Slough; none of these were children recently in SBC's care. Each of these had a plan to assist with getting them out of their present situation.
- The Slough Wellbeing Board would take a report on the Rough Sleeping Task & Finish Group on 30th November 2018.
- SBC staff took part in the Annual Sleep Out which assessed the exact state of the local homelessness situation.
- Households in temporary accommodation could only enter PRS properties.

Resolved: That the Panel decide how to progress with the Homelessness Plan once it had been circulated.

31. Slough Real Time Passenger Information

Members noted the recent improvement in the service and therefore resolved to take no further action.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

32. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

33. Attendance Record 2018 - 19

Resolved: That the attendance record be noted.

34. Date of Next Meeting - 15th January 2019

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.28 pm)