

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 3rd April, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), N Holledge, S Parmar, Sabah, Shah and Wright

Non voting co-opted members:- Paul Fuller

PART 1

58. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

59. Minutes of the last meeting held on 28th February 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2019 be approved as a correct record.

60. Action progress report

Members received written responses to supplementary questions asked at the previous meeting on the impact of the Burnham Beeches recycling centre and on recycling in Slough. A number of further questions were raised and the Members expressed disappointment that an officer was not in attendance to respond.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Vice-Chair be provided with the calculation of the annual saving of £51k should the Burnham site shut in September and the data to evidence the statement that the closure either in part or full would not have a big impact on non-chargeable waste going to Chalvey Household Waste Recycling Centre. This information to also be included on the Action Progress Report for the next meeting;
2. an item on recycling in Slough be included on the agenda for the next meeting to include information on whether South Bucks DC residents would be charged to use Chalvey HWRC should Burnham Beeches HWRC close, whether ID was required and whether there had been any discussion regarding Slough BC buying out Burnham Beeches HWRC and renting it back to Bucks CC;
3. appropriate officers attend Panel meetings to respond to questions arising from Member questions and Action Progress Reports.

61. Member Questions

Members noted the tabled response to a Member's question regarding whether there were any incentives for electrical vehicles when issuing residents parking permits

Resolved: That the response to the member's question be noted;

62. Housing Services - Scrutiny Overview Indicators

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the Housing Service's performance regarding the agreed indicators. It was noted that the restructure of the Neighbourhood Services and Strategic Housing Services had taken place on 1 November 2018. The Service Lead, Housing (People) Services introduced the report and drew particular attention to:

- the figures in Appendix A were cumulative to date as the full year information was not yet available;
- the numbers in temporary accommodation was a significant challenge. The numbers had reduced from a high of 470 in July 2018 to 407 at the end of March which had helped reduce the overspend;
- void management, repairs and maintenance had transferred to Housing Services on 1 April and the average turnaround was about 100 days.

In response to questions from Members on performance indicators, it was noted that:

- prior to July 2017 there had not been any performance targets to measure against. The 2018/19 targets were mainly self regulation with officers setting targets which would be assessed and reviewed;
- Serena House had been used by the Council as a night shelter from December to the end of April with nightly attendance of about 70
- The Service Lead (Housing Services) undertook to review the number of Residents Forums held each year;
- the repair and maintenance indicators reflected the way the contract was written. A large percentage of complaints concerned tradespersons having to return as they did not have the right equipment on their first visit. The contract management function remained with Neighbourhood Services and the Service Lead was interested in factual feedback from the Residents Panel Board;
- the Service Lead (Housing Services) undertook to follow up a anti social behaviour case once the reporting Member advised him of the details;
- 82 private sector properties had been let. There was an incentive payment to landlords of £5k to £6k for a two year tenancy;

- Quarter 4 information on the number of ASB related cases had not been received in time to be included in the report;
- there was a backlog of nearly 200 Home Improvement Agency cases for adaptations;
- noise nuisance required a level of proof before action could be taken;
- With regard to the licensing of HMOs, Cabinet had agreed an extended scheme using new legislation in Chalvey Central which would be implemented in July. The requirements would be highlighted at the Landlords Forum in June.

The improvement in void management was recognised and it was hoped that it would continue. The Chair suggested that if there was not an improvement in the numbers to, say 35, the Panel should scrutinise the area.

Resolved:

1. That a joint report from Housing Services and the Home Improvement Agency be submitted to the June meeting of the Panel;
2. That the report be noted

63. Downsizing - Under Occupation of Social Housing

The Panel received an update on Council lettings activity and in particular concerning offers of accommodation to tenants wanting to downsize. It was noted that this followed a revision in the Housing Allocation Scheme and the Tenants Incentive Scheme.

The Service Lead (Housing Services) introduced the report highlighting the increase in the incentive package from £1k to £2k per bedroom released, the number of lettings made to tenants who had downsized since 2014 and that there were about 40 cases currently on the system.

In response to questions, the Panel was informed that the mutual exchange scheme was different in that the Council did not gain a property for allocation to a person on the housing waiting list as a result of the exchange. The Service Lead (Housing Services) undertook to investigate a mutual exchange referred to by a Member if they provided him with the details.

The Panel noted that those tenants on secure tenancies established prior to 2012 would be disinclined to downsize under the scheme due to the newer flexible tenancies. Probationary tenancies were offered for one year. Members were informed that it was planned to review the tenancy strategy.

In response to questions, it was noted that:

- supported housing was generally offered by housing associations but had become less viable due to changes in the rules for funding;
- the case studies referred to in the report illustrated where tenants required downsizing to a specialised property regardless of the incentive scheme

Resolved: That the update be noted.

64. Progress with the implementation of the Housing Asset Management Strategy

The Panel considered a report which provided details of progress made on plans to expand low and medium rise housing. It was noted that the Housing Development and Contracts client team were undertaking an analysis of findings gained from the first year delivery of the responsive repair service, under the new RMI contract, to augment and validate the earlier planned maintenance priorities raised by the Dyson stock condition survey data and thereby inform and prioritise strategic asset management and investment decisions.

The Service Lead Housing, Development and Contracts introduced the report and highlighted the development potential of garage sites for new homes, additional storeys to existing blocks of purpose built flats bungalows for extra care provision, bedsits for development for dementia care provision, and review of the sheltered housing schemes. In addition extensions and loft extensions would reduce the need for transfer to larger properties.

The Panel was informed that the next step would be the first draft of the development strategy which would be submitted to the Lead Officer (Housing Services) to see if the proposals fitted the demand, then other Service Leads and to Cabinet in September. The Panel agreed that it wanted to consider the report.

In response to questions, the Panel was informed that:

- there were companies who specialised in the construction of additional storeys on blocks of flats. Any proposals would include the feasibility of tenants remaining in situ;
- the timing would need to take into account the planning development process;
- resident consultation would be arranged in consultation with the Service Lead (Housing Services);
- there was legislation regarding fire extinguishers, sprinklers were considered appropriate beyond the third or fourth floors and fire suppressers were appropriate for assisted living properties.

Resolved: That

1. the report be noted;
2. a report on the draft development strategy be submitted to the September meeting of the Panel:

65. Members' Attendance Record

Resolved – That the attendance record be noted.

66. Date of Next Meeting - 24th June 2019

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 24 June 2019.

The Panel requested the submission of a report on the Key Worker Scheme which had been deferred at the previous meeting to either the September or December meeting.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 18.30 and closed at 20.45)