

**Extraordinary Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 17th March, 2020.**

**Present:-** Councillors Ajaib, Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, S Parmar and co-optee Trevor Pollard

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Smith and Strutton

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillors Plenty, Wright, M Holledge, Minhas and co-optee Manvinder Matharu

**PART 1**

**61. Election of Chair**

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Senior Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting and sought nominations for a Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Hulme proposed Councillor Ajaib as Chair; this was seconded by Councillor Gahir and agreed by the Panel.

**Resolved** – That Councillor Ajaib be elected as Chair for the meeting.

**62. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Gahir declared that he was a taxi driver. He remained in the Council Chamber throughout the meeting.

In relation to agenda item 4 – Housing Strategy Update, (Minute No. 66), Councillor Ajaib declared that he was a Director on the Slough Urban Renewal Board. He remained in the Council Chamber throughout the meeting.

**63. Member Questions**

None were received.

*The Panel agreed to amend the order of the agenda and take item 5 – Highways and Parking in Slough as the first report.*

**64. Highways and Parking in Slough**

The Team Leader, Parking introduced a report which sought to address the issues raised by the Panel at the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

Members were informed of the highways and parking issues around Slough and the reasons for the delays to complete some works. It was explained that in 2015, an experienced Parking Engineer Officer had left the Council, and

## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

since then the service had been managing a backlog in the delivery of schemes. Recruitment to the vacant post had been difficult, due to the labour market's shortage of experienced parking engineers. During 2018, a Parking Appeals Officer expressed an interest in career progression. The officer undertook a six month training programme and was subsequently appointed as the Council's Parking Engineer in December 2018. It was explained that the volume of emails received by the service was very high and unmanageable for one engineer to respond to in a timely manner. A recent Star Chamber bid to fund an additional engineer post had been successful and the recruitment process would commence during April/May 2020.

The Team Leader, Parking then invited questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- In relation to staffing, a Member queried the level of administrative support the Parking Service team had in place to deal with queries received from residents. It was explained that currently, the Parking Engineer dealt with all administrative tasks and the delivery of schemes. The recruitment of an additional Parking Engineer would assist with the current capacity issues. There was currently no financial resource in place to fund the appointment of an administration officer post.
- It was noted that the Leader of the Council had requested that the Parking Service team consider borough-wide parking solutions, and provide him with a report in April 2020. A Member requested that the report be shared with the Panel. The Team Leader, Parking advised that a draft report would be presented to the Leader for comment and a steer regarding the solutions that could be implemented.
- A Member raised concern regarding school drop off and pick up arrangements and asked what measures could be put in place to manage traffic within these localities. It was explained that London borough councils had powers to implement controlled parking zones in areas around schools. However, these powers were not available to non-London councils. Currently, the measures adopted by the Parking Service team to control areas around schools included: 'keep clear' demarcation markings to assist children to walk to school, and enforcement officer patrols around school areas each morning and evening. It was explained that a number of councils nationally had implemented zones around schools to prevent traffic movement within these areas during peak drop off and pick up times. The Team Leader, Parking was currently investigating what powers other councils had deployed to implement these measures and was investigating if a similar approach could be adopted in Slough.

## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

- Concern was raised about the use of electric scooters on pavements. Members were advised that such use was illegal and officers were currently discussing this matter with the Department for Transport.
- A Member asked for an example of a 'borough-wide' parking solution currently being considered. In addition, further information was sought regarding the use of Members' Community Investment Funding (CIF) for highways works. It was explained that the types of borough-wide solutions available included: yellow-line painting, and the introduction of parking restrictions, and limited waiting bays. With regarding to CIF, it was explained that the administration of the funding was being reviewed to establish whether the processes could be streamlined and resources could be better used.
- It was requested that Members be provided with a quarterly report setting out the Parking Services schedule of work, relevant to their respective wards; as this would assist communication with residents. In addition, it was recommended that staff resource within the Parking Service team be increased to enable officers to complete outstanding works as expediently as possible.

The Chair then invited Councillor Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Strutton asked if the Council's apprenticeship scheme was being utilised to train a parking services administration officer. It was explained that the apprenticeship scheme was a relatively new initiative, and there was no formal parking services training or degree courses available for people to enrol on. Discussions with the Apprenticeship team were being undertaken to consider if a scheme could be developed to incorporate highways and parking functions.

In relation to the Disabled Bay Policy which allowed a resident to apply for a disabled bay outside their property, it was highlighted that these spaces were not exclusively allocated to the resident who had requested the bay; rather the bay was available to anyone within the street, with a blue badge to use. It was explained that the Policy did not limit the number of bays per road, and each application was assessed on an individual basis.

Councillor Strutton raised concern regarding the broken lifts in Herschel Car Park, which consequently meant disabled people were unable to use the designated car parking bays. It was explained that there had been a delay repairing the lifts, due to a review of the car parking strategy throughout the town centre; however, an order for new lifts had now been placed. Councillor Strutton asked when would a pavement parking scheme and school controlled parking zones be put in place. It was explained that the British Parking Association had been lobbying Government to provide out of London local authorities with the same powers as inner London local authorities to allow officers to take action to alleviate traffic congestion around school areas.

## **Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20**

The Chair then invited Councillor Smith to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Smith said that in his ward there was a lot of damaged street furniture that had not been replaced. In response, it was reported that the Council's Highways Inspector had recently carried out a review of works required throughout Colnbrook and a list of issues had been compiled.

Councillor Smith asked if the Parking Enforcement Officer funded by Heathrow Airport, could be provided with additional powers to tackle issues such as: the use of laybys as waiting/sleeping areas for taxi drivers, and laybys being used as overflow car parks. It was explained that the duties of the civil enforcement officer had been agreed with Heathrow Airport and the main duty of the role was to enforce parking restrictions. If parking restrictions were not being flouted, no enforcement action could be taken.

The Chair thanked the Team Leader, Parking for the report.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the Team Leader, Parking be requested to provide Members with a quarterly report setting out the Parking Services schedule of work, relevant to their respective wards.
- (b) That a report be referred to Cabinet requesting that sufficient staff resource be allocated to the Parking Service Team, to enable officers to complete outstanding works as expediently as possible.

## **65. Mass Rapid Transport Phase 2 – A4 Widening and Sutton Lane Gyratory**

The Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects provided Members with a précis of the report.

The Slough Mass Rapid Transit (SMaRT) scheme was a key element of the Council's document 'A Transport Vision for the Centre of Slough', and was a continuation of improvements being made by the Council to increase the level of accessibility to, from and around the town. The overall scheme aimed to make radical changes at key hotspots to tackle longstanding congestion and air quality issues, and build highway capacity for the future.

SMaRT Phase 2 was designed to achieve a number of positive outcomes for Slough, including: delivering convenient, sustainable, high quality passenger transport between Heathrow and Slough town centre; relieving congestion on the eastern section of the A4 corridor, assisting the delivery of housing development in the town centre; future-proofing the eastern section of the A4 for changes likely to result from the Heathrow expansion; and to promote overall improvements in air quality.

The proposals under the SMaRT Phase 2 comprised of the following elements:

## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

- Junction modifications and traffic signal provision at the London Road/Sutton Lane/ Colnbrook Bypass gyratory. Pedestrian and cycle crossings on London Road would be improved and bus stop waiting areas upgraded to provide for local needs at Brands Hill including residential, commercial and hotel properties. Discussions would be held with third parties to improve road safety by relocating exiting services in the vicinity of the junction.
- The widening of London Road to two lanes westbound between M4 Junction 5 roundabout and Sutton Lane with the conversion of the two lanes to bus lanes to improve bus services to the area.

The design proposal set out on page 4 of the report was the latest iteration for the Sutton Lane gyratory and was currently being modelled to ascertain whether this option would provide extra capacity and reduce the congestion in the area. The redesign of the gyratory was expected to eliminate the 'exit blocking' and would incorporate a new traffic signal control layout including managing the flow from the Old London Road and the by-pass to make traffic more free-flowing.

The design over the next few months would be reviewed for air quality impacts utilising the standard Air Quality Assessment process. Brands Hill had been declared as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2006 due to exceedances of the European Union limit value for nitrogen dioxide. Brands Hill AQMA had the highest nitrogen dioxide concentrations in Slough during 2018; therefore it was important that action was taken to improve air quality in this area, and that any scheme proposed was thoroughly scrutinised to ensure it did not contribute to a worsening of air quality, particularly as the scheme would result in an increase in capacity on the road network.

Assessment would consider the current baseline air quality in Brands Hill and compare it to future scenarios with and without the scheme in place and resulting air quality impacts. Both the construction and operational phases would be reviewed, taking into account the combined effects with other schemes in the area. To ensure that air quality impact was avoided, appropriate mitigation would be sought. For example, during the construction phase, all construction Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) would be limited to Euro 6 emission standard and routing plans would be designed to reduce air quality impacts. The Council was committed to improving air quality in the Brands Hill area and had secured funding to support the modal travel shift agenda, whilst simultaneously seeking to improve capacity and traffic flow at the Sutton Lane gyratory.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A Member congratulated the Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects on the new regular No. 4 bus service running from Slough to

## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

Heathrow airport. However, it was highlighted that the return journey from Heathrow back into Slough was infrequent and only ran an hourly service; 54 minutes past the hour. Therefore, for shift workers finishing on the hour, there was a significant wait for the next bus service returning to Slough. It was requested that a more frequent bus service be provided from Heathrow to Slough. The Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects agreed to feedback the comments raised to the operator and Heathrow Airport for them to consider if the timings could be altered to provide a more regular return service.

- The poor air quality in the Brands Hill area was highlighted and a Member asked what measures could be taken to reduce emissions and HGV movement in this locality. It was explained that HGVs were used in this area to transport gravel freight. The gravel extraction operations were undertaken outside of Slough, but transported through the Borough. Because the extraction works took place outside of the Slough, there were no powers available to the Council to control this activity. Use of low emission HGVs was encouraged and consideration of more stringent restrictions that could be implemented was being reviewed as part of a cleaner air study.

The Chair then invited Councillor Smith to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Smith welcomed the revised Sutton Lane gyratory proposal and said it was a significant improvement on the previous scheme. He requested that Colnbrook with Poyle Parish Council be consulted on any Air Quality scheme considered. With regard to the Sutton Lane proposed Park and Ride scheme, he asked if there would be a turning circle and how buses would manoeuvre. It was explained that the area would be traffic light controlled to manage the traffic flow. Councillor Smith raised concern regarding traffic movement on Brands Hill Road, in particular vehicles turning into the BP garage. He asked if any measures could be put in place to stop this unsafe turning manoeuvre. It was explained that officers were seeking to implement a physical barrier and a traffic order to prevent vehicles turning into the garage; however, the traffic order had to be supported by the police. The Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects confirmed that these options would be incorporated into the design of the scheme. In addition, it was explained that consideration had been given to the exit and entrance at Hills Rise junction and proposals would form part of the scheme.

Councillor Smith raised further concern regarding the hydrology of the area. He explained that hard standing had been laid in Sutton Lane, preventing sufficient drainage, which had caused flooding in the locality. It was explained that discussions had been held with Highways England and work would be undertaken to understand the drainage requirements in the area.

The Chair then invited Councillor Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30.

## **Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20**

Councillor Strutton highlighted that there had been significant flooding in Little Sutton Lane during December 2019. He queried if the appropriate Environmental Impact Assessments had been undertaken. With regard to the Park and Ride scheme, he reported that all the trees in the area had been removed, as such removing any tree surface water absorption. He asked if the removed trees would be replaced, if tree and wildlife assessments had been carried out, and whether there were any protected trees in the area.

It was explained that all the necessary environmental assessments would be carried out as part of the planning application process. Drainage issues would be addressed as part of the environmental assessment process. The planning application process required that stringent measures were in place to mitigate any flood risk. A landscaping assessment would be carried out as part of the environmental assessments; and appropriate landscaping would be implemented to shield residents from the Park and Ride scheme.

The Chair thanked the Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects for the report.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Service Lead, Major Infrastructure Projects be requested to liaise with the bus operator and Heathrow Airport to establish if the timings of the No.4 bus service running from Heathrow Airport to Slough could be altered to provide a more frequent service.

## **66. Housing Strategy Update**

The Service Lead, Housing (People) Services introduced a report that sought Members views and comments regarding the Council's draft Housing Strategy and associated Action Plan.

Members were invited to comment and ask questions.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was noted that an ambition of the Strategy was to prevent homelessness. A Member asked what level of staffing was in place to provide advice to tenants. It was explained that advice was provided to tenants by a range of officers. Welfare provision was delivered via the Council's Customer Services department; Welfare Officers provided advice regarding benefit payments; a Tenancy Sustainability Officer post was funded by the Government; and a key role of Housing Demand Officers was to prevent homelessness. It was agreed that this information would be reflected in the Housing Strategy document. In

## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

addition, it was explained that frequently tenants at risk of eviction contacted the Council too late in the process; it was important tenants and landlords were aware of the options early, so these could be worked through as soon as possible.

- The Panel was informed that the appointed consultants, Campbell Tickell, would be providing information to complete the sections of the draft Housing Strategy and Action Plan currently showing as blank or 'complete later, once detail agreed'.
- A Member queried how information was communicated to private sector and housing association tenants. It was explained that a Private Tenants' Forum meeting had been held in September 2019, but the attendance had been low. A Forum meeting would be held again and further thought would be given to publicity and how the next event was promoted. Consideration would be given to the best means of engaging with housing association tenants.
- Clarification was sought regarding the approach adopted towards key workers. It was explained that a pilot Key Worker Scheme for teachers and social workers had been trialled, but had not been successful due to the lack of take up. Further consideration of the definition of a key worker was required. A new Key Worker Scheme would include council and private sector housing, allowing tenants the possibility of purchasing a council house. Work on a new scheme would commence in the next new financial year.
- In relation to housing provision, a Member queried the term 'northern expansion'. It was explained that the term was used in recognition that current housing demand could not be met within Slough, and assistance from South Bucks District Council was required to resolve Slough's housing need. Discussions were currently being held with South Bucks District Council as part of the work being carried out in relation to the Council's Local Plan.

The Chair then invited Councillor Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Strutton raised concerns in relation to delays in transferring people from hospital to home, and the installation of mobility adaptations. He stated that there needed to be a better assessment of tenants' needs before they were housed; in particular, the availability of car parking provision for family dwellings. He suggested that job vacancies the Council found difficult to recruit to, such as parking engineers, be designated as 'key workers'.

The Service Lead, Housing (People) Services agreed that further consideration of occupations categorised as 'key worker' roles would be undertaken.

Councillor Strutton sought clarification regarding the use of short term tenancies and the Council's use of the term 'forever homes'. It was explained



## Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20

these issues related to the Council's Tenancy Strategy. Government legislation had introduced flexible tenancies, requiring every tenancy to be reviewed after three years. This requirement had proved onerous and had created a 'bureaucratic burden' on many housing associations. Members were advised that the Council's Tenancy Strategy would be reviewed in due course and consideration would be given to whether a 'flexible tenancy' or 'home for life' approach was more practical.

Councillor Strutton raised further concerns regarding the quality of housing provided to tenants, voids, and the timescales taken to bring housing stock back into use. The Service Lead, Housing (People) Services explained that the Council's housing repairs partner, Osbourne Property Services Ltd, managed property maintenance and voids issues. The Osbourne Housing Development and Contracts Services Lead was scheduled to attend the next Panel meeting on 1st April 2020.

The Chair then invited Councillor Smith to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Councillor Smith raised concerns regarding inadequate accommodation, mould, damp and infestations occurring in properties soon after a tenant had moved in. The Service Lead (People) Services reported that there had been three recent incidences of tenants having to be rehoused due to their properties becoming uninhabitable. It was explained that at every stage works had been signed off, but unfortunately in these cases, issues had arisen.

A Member asked how the actions of the Housing Strategy would be prioritised. In addition, it was queried if reference to private sector health and safety compliance issues arising from the Grenfell Fire would be reflected in the Strategy. It was agreed that these issues could be included in the final Housing Strategy document. With regard to the number of action points, it was acknowledged that there were currently too many and these needed to be rationalised. The importance of robust governance arrangements, transparent targets and measures was emphasised. In addition, the necessity to deliver affordable housing, particularly on sites the Council had provided to a developer was highlighted.

The Chair thanked the Service Lead, Housing (People) Services for the report and requested that the final versions of the Housing Strategy and Action Plan be circulated to the Panel.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the comments raised by Panel Members, as detailed above, be taken into consideration during the finalisation of the Housing Strategy and Action Plan documents.
- (b) That the Service Lead, Housing (People) Services, be requested to circulate to the Panel the final versions of the Housing Strategy and Action Plan.

## **Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 17.03.20**

### **67. Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel 2019/20 Work Programme**

**Resolved** – That the Forward Work Programme, as set out in Appendix A of the report, be agreed.

### **68. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20**

**Resolved** - That the details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

### **69. Date of Next Meeting - 1st April 2020**

**Resolved** – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.35 pm)