

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 31st October, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Ajaib, Gahir, M Holledge, Hulme, Matloob, Minhas, S Parmar and Pollard

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Wright

PART 1

21. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hulme declared an interest as a former employee of DWP in connection with the Member question on Slough Foodbank.

22. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th September 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

Matters arising

1 Key Worker Housing (Minute 4 resolution 2)

It was noted that an evaluation of the key worker housing scheme will take place when the next phase of the Stoke Road units are let, which was anticipated to be the end of November 2019;

2. Maintenance and Investment (RMI) Update (Minute 5 resolution 5)

It was noted that information on the number of properties where asbestos had been removed would be included in the comprehensive report on issues appertaining to Osborne that was due to be submitted to the Panel.

23. Member Questions

Members noted the tabled response to Members questions regarding Slough Foodbank, food hygiene and benefits. Responses were given to a number of supplementary questions from Members.

With regard to the question on foodbanks, Members expressed concern at the increasing reliance on food banks and similar provision in Slough and sought further information to enable a greater understanding of the issue. The discussion included the sources of such food available in Slough, the various organisations involved in the distribution, advertising and compilation of the referral forms. In addition, Members sought statistics on provision made by the Council.

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RESOLVED: That

1. a task and finish group be set up on food poverty comprising the Chair and Councillors Hulme and Ajaib. The terms of reference to be to identify the reasons for the increasing number of people who were relying on sources of food such as the Slough Foodbank, to look at the reasons for this reliance and whether Council policies and procedures could help to alleviate this issue;
2. a more detailed explanation of the difference between the Food Hygiene Rating scheme score rating and the risk rating of the business and the monitoring of the system be submitted to the 28 November 2019 Panel meeting;
3. the statistics from the DWP on the number of residents on working age benefits was noted;
4. the responses to the Members' questions as circulated be noted.

24. Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Panel received a progress report on the implementation of the property licensing schemes introduced in Spring 2019 under the Housing Act 2004.

The Housing Regulation Manager introduced the report, outlining the mandatory licensing, additional licensing and selective licensing schemes in operation in Slough. The Panel noted the rationale and legal justification for the property Licensing, the application process and enforcement.

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

- over 1000 applications had been submitted and approximately 800 were in process. The early bird discount finished that day;
- the licensing provisions did not apply to Air B&B properties in general terms unless there were long term lets;
- adoption of a selective licensing scheme required a consultation period of six to nine months. Introduction of the selective licensing schemes in Chalvey and Central Slough had required the submission of evidence to justify such a scheme including the link between anti social behaviour and high levels of private renting;
- officers were unable to take action regarding 'beds in sheds' if enforcement action was current;
- applications for HMOs were rarely refused. It was more likely that a reduced term and conditions to bring up the property up to standard would be agreed;
- an additional member of staff had been recruited and it was hoped to recruit further additional staff dependant on the Council's resources. A new online system had hastened the process;

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- should a licence not be awarded there was a statutory requirement for the Local Authority to take on interim management which could be extended and a charge be put on the property if necessary.

The Panel was informed of current initiatives including;

- the progression of the procurement of mobile inspection software;
- ongoing measurement of effectiveness;
- ongoing communication with Thames Valley Police and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services;
- a presentation to the tenants forum a couple of months previously with the aim to repeat early the following year.

The Panel made reference to individual cases and attention was drawn to Members' obligations to inform officers and encourage others to do so.

RESOLVED: That

1. the progress made so far in implementing the Licensing Schemes be noted;
2. an update be provided in a year.

25. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information

26. High Street Redevelopment Update

The Chair advised the Panel that a verbal update on the town centre redevelopment would not be provided at the meeting as a report was in the course of preparation for Cabinet and Council in November. There would subsequently be the opportunity for the Panel to receive an update.

27. Voids Update

The Panel received a report from the Service Lead, Housing (People) Services on an update on void performance. Attention was drawn to the review of the voids performance scrutiny overview indicator based on the average re-let time which excluded any period of time that a void property was in actual major works.

In response to questions, it was noted that:

- the length of the average void days had been influenced by the discovery of asbestos, a long term tenant or where there was no next of kin;
- there had only been one minor void in quarters one and two due to the long turnaround time. Ways to reduce this were being considered and would be available for scrutiny. A review would be undertaken with Osborne on all aspects of the void operation

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RESOLVED: That

1. information be circulated to the Panel as to why the average void days were greater for the standard voids than the major works voids;
2. that a further explanation of the situation regarding the void volume over the past 12 months for secure and fixed term tenancies be included in the forthcoming comprehensive report on maintenance and repairs.

28. Forward Work Programme

The Panel reviewed its work programme and

RESOLVED: That the work programme be updated to include the following:

1. a special meeting be held in February on all aspects of the RMI contract. The Chair to liaise with the officers to ensure a comprehensive review and attendance. As a result the item on Osborne missed appointments be deleted from the list of items for 14 January 2020;
2. the 28 November 2019 meeting to include an item on Food Hygiene;
3. confirmation be sent to the Panel as to whether there is a meeting on 1 April 2020.

29. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20

The Members received the Members' attendance records and

RESOLVED: That the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

30. Date of Next Meeting - 28 November 2019

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 28 November 2019.

(Note: The meeting opened at 18.30 and closed at 20.30).

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified)