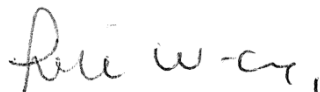


Date of issue: Wednesday 23rd October, 2019

MEETING:	NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL (Councillors Plenty (Chair), Wright (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Gahir, M. Holledge, Hulme, Matloob, Minhas and S. Parmar) <u>Non-Voting Co-Opted Members</u> Manvinder Matharu (Residents Panel Board), Trevor Pollard (Residents Panel Board) and Dave Watkins (Residents Panel Board)
DATE AND TIME:	THURSDAY 31 ST OCTOBER, 2019 AT 6.30PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	DIFAF SHARBA 01753 875411

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



JOSIE WRAGG
Chief Executive

**AGENDA
PART 1**

**AGENDA
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CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest

*All Members who believe they have a Disclosable
Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered
at the meeting must declare that interest and, having*



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regard to the circumstances described in Section 4 paragraph 4.6 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th September, 2019 1 - 8

3. Member Questions

(An opportunity for panel members to ask questions of the relevant Director / Assistant Director, relating to pertinent, topical issues affecting their Directorate – maximum of 10 minutes allocated.)

SCRUTINY ISSUES

4. Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation 9 - 14

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

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

(The panel will consider any reports marked to be noted/for information and determine whether future scrutiny is considered necessary – maximum of 5 minutes allocated.)

6. High Street Redevelopment Update Verbal Report

7. Voids Update 15 - 22

8. Forward Work Programme 23 - 26

9. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20 27 - 28

10. Date of Next Meeting - 28 November 2019

Press and Public

You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before the Committee considers any items in the Part II agenda. Please contact the Democratic Services Officer shown above for further details.

The Council allows the filming, recording and photographing at its meetings that are open to the public. By entering the meeting room and using the public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings. Anyone proposing to film, record or take photographs



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of a meeting is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non hand held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.

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Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday 5th September, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Wright (Vice-Chair), Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, Minhas and S Parmar

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Ajaib

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Gahir declared his employment as a taxi driver.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 24 June 2019

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2019 be approved as a correct record, subject to it being noted that Councillor Matloob was in attendance.

3. Member Questions

Members noted the tabled response to Members questions regarding disabled parking bays and car clubs. Responses were given to a number of supplementary questions from Members.

Members discussed the provision of disabled car parking bays and whether a report on the subject was required. Following discussion, it was agreed that as those councillors who had raised the matter, and therefore were aware of the details, had the opportunity to call it in, a report was not required.

In addition, a response was provided on questions raised at the last meeting on how Japanese knotweed was dealt with and how Bucks CC presented recycling statistics at Langley HRC:

Japanese knotweed

'We offer advice on our website, with many links to other sites including DEFRA. The short answer is use herbicides, bury it or indeed burn it, or arrange for disposal at an authorised landfill that accepts controlled wastes. It is only an offence if you allow it to grow into another person's land
<http://www.slough.gov.uk/pests-pollution-and-food-hygiene/invasive-plants.aspx>

Recycling statistics at Langley HRC

Bucks include rubble in their calculations and by doing so report 70% recycling. If they exclude rubble it would average 49% Recycling. Their boards also state that they recover 100%. Recovery includes both recycling

and incineration with energy recovery. Sometimes people get confused between recycling and recovery.

Our Chalvey recycling rate currently excludes rubble and we are currently having difficulty recycling wood. Like Bucks we have a 100% Recovery Rate since we also send residual waste to incineration with energy recovery. Moving forward we will adopt the same assumptions as Bucks so that we are comparable.'

Resolved: That

1. the responses to the Members' questions as circulated and the follow up information on Japanese knotweed and recycling statistics at Langley HRC be noted;
2. an agenda item on car clubs, with particular reference to S106 contributions, be submitted to a future meeting;
3. that the response to the supplementary question as to whether wood recycling was available at both recycling centres be circulated.

4. Key Worker Housing

The Panel received an update on key worker housing and progress made via a pilot scheme which was currently underway. The Service Lead – Housing (People) Services introduced the report and outlined the rationale for a Key Worker Scheme and the background to the setting up of the pilot scheme of six new build properties at Stoke Road which were owned and managed by James Elliman Homes. It was noted that to date only two confirmed allocations had been made but this was due in the main to the development being delayed for almost a year coupled with some administrative issues with schools which it was believed had been resolved. The Panel noted that a site visit was due to be held the following week subsequent to which it would be evaluated to consider whether to proceed with the scheme.

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

- James Elliman Homes offered only short term assured tenancies. A key worker with a tenancy under the scheme would not lose the tenancy if they ceased to be a key worker. As the tenancies were for two years there was the opportunity to review the situation after that time;
- the homes which James Elliman Homes had purchased were of a quite high specification. No cost benefit analysis had been undertaken so success was not measured by how many had been allocated for key workers;
- the plan was to allocate 30 properties to key workers. Due to no offers to undertake the scheme administration the Service Lead – Housing (People) Services circulated property details to the education service to market. Under the current arrangements, the Council marketed the properties, received applications and undertook basic checks. A waiting list was not maintained;

- teachers and social workers had been identified for the scheme as they were council employees whereas NHS workers and the police were not;
- intermediate rent was approximately 70% of market rent. The Intermediate Rent Scheme for key workers at Regional House was full. The Council had had 100% nomination rights until the properties were let;
- a further phase of key worker properties at Stoke Road was due to be available at the beginning of October. They were funded by section 106 contributions and had 12 car parking spaces for 15 units, less than if it had been known that they were for key workers;
- properties identified for key workers but not allocated to them would return to the regular housing allocation.

Resolved: That

1. the report and ongoing work be noted;
2. information be circulated to the Panel on an analysis of the scheme to enable measurement of its success;
3. an update be submitted to the Panel early next year on letting progress;
4. the Chair be consulted as to the possible submission of a short report on the emerging themes in the housing strategy review with attendance by consultants and whether a separate meeting on the subject was required.

5. Maintenance and Investment (RMI) Update

The Panel received a presentation on year 2 of the repairs, maintenance and investment partnership from the Osborne Account Director and Compliance Director. It was highlighted that whilst the target of 5% for calls lost had not been met during April and May and penalties had been incurred, an improvement plan and subsequent action had succeeded in turning it round.

Arising from a Member query, the Accounts Director stated that the information given for Voids Performance in the report had been corrected in the presentation.

Particular attention was drawn to:

- the 100% gas service compliance for 17 consecutive months put Slough in the top quartile in the country;
- the 15 service delivery plans were constantly reviewed;
- it was recognised that the engagement plan required review and to this end Osborne had attended the first tranche of neighbourhood forums in August. The first tranche of estate days in August had also been attended and repairs were offered on the day.

In response to questions regarding asbestos, the Panel was informed that there was a high level of asbestos within the stock which reflected the age and construction types. The use of asbestos in building had been allowed up

to 2000. Prior to the Osborne contract the incidence of asbestos had been unknown and surveys had not taken place. As a result the survey in the communal blocks took 5 months and had to be repeated annually. There was now a register in compliance with the regulations and alpha tracker software collected data and identified hotspots. Work had commenced on the low rise blocks, as an intrusive inspection the survey would take 18 months to 2 years. Information in regard to individual properties was based either on void properties or if asbestos was suspected during intrusive responsive repairs in which case work would not proceed until the property was surveyed. Once sufficient information was obtained cloning for similar properties would take place. Asbestos was either removed or encapsulated, the latter required recurring inspections.

In response to questions from the Panel it was noted that:

- the 100% customer satisfaction was based on those customers who had responded to the questionnaire;
- the de-designated schemes for fire assessments comprised the sheltered housing schemes for which fire stopping was complete. The orders for doors were subject to 7-10 weeks for manufacturing due to demand. A fire system responding to heat in addition to smoke had been ordered. A fire alarm system was being designed and would go out to tender, with a potential start at the end of the fire door programme;
- the capital programme focussed on compliance;
- monthly meetings were held with the Berkshire Fire Service;
- routine appointments had not been included in the presentation as not part of the contractual reporting and had no performance targets. They were however reported monthly and the information would be shared with the Panel;
- data on the average time for the refurbishment of voids was not available. The contractual time for Osborne ran from when the keys were handed over whereas for SBC it was when it became vacant. Responsibility for refurbishing voids transferred to the Housing (People) Services on 1 April 2019 and had reduced from approximately 91 days at the end of the financial year to about 80 which was recognised as too high;
- the list of tenant responsibilities would be circulated to the Panel. It was noted that Interserve had undertaken more than Osborne's contractual responsibilities such as replacing light bulbs. Recharges took place for items such as DIY, fencing and misuse.

Resolved: That

1. the report be noted;

2. a report be submitted on the length of voids;
3. Osborne to
 1. include missed appointments by residents in the report back on performance with regard to missed performance;
 2. report back on the number of properties where asbestos had been removed;
 3. report on non contractual routine repairs ;
 4. provide a list of rechargeable repairs;
 5. demonstrate the % target for appointments kept (emergency and urgent) in a different visual to being based on volume as at present.

6. Strong Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods

The Panel received a report and presentation on the Strong, Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods initiative. The Panel was informed that the initiative had been developed on the back of good practice in Manor Park through which the local community had been engaged with, enabled and empowered to take on a range of community development and prevention based initiatives. The approach had moved from a position where the expectation was one that the Council should respond to all need, to one where the community took on responsibility for a range of community activity.

In response to a question as to interaction with residents, it was reported that instead of a number of voluntary groups and forums working in isolation the intention was to bring them together with one collective plan.

The Panel was informed that:

- Trelawney Avenue had been chosen as significant work was taking place in the area including proposals regarding a community asset at the old Merrymakers site. Discussions were being held with clubs with a view to their taking over and running a changing facility at Kedermister Park;
- as reference was made to the Manor Park initiative but no detail provided, information would be circulated to the Panel;
- it was emphasised that the emphasis was to get the wider community involved and not those who shouted loudest. In order to reach out to those not actively involved, a needs analysis consultation was posted through doors, circulated by primary schools, health partners and council colleagues.

Resolved: That

1. the report be noted;
2. details of the Manor Park initiative be circulated to the Panel.

7. Slough Town Centre Update

The Panel received an update on the Clean Safe Vibrant Programme and information on the emerging Joint Framework Masterplan between SBC and British Land for the centre of Slough. Members were informed that the Council and partners had been successful in establishing a BID (Business Improvement District).

It was noted that British Land had undertaken development management functions for the Queensmere and Observatory sites in the town centre. Discussion had begun to establish the most appropriate ways to bring forward the development of key sites and improvement of the public realm in the centre of Slough. Development options for the TVU site included office space, retail and residential units. Due to the impact of online shopping it would be a reduced retail offer with the emphasis on leisure, food and beverage. The cinema footprint would also be reduced. Work was taking place investigating core key growth sectors and comparing Slough with other similar towns. A report would be submitted to Cabinet on 16 September on the wider programme and by March 2020 on the updated masterplan and, subject to approval, a planning application would be made in early 2021.

In response to questions, it was noted that:

- in-depth consultation with residents had not taken place at this stage as consideration was being given to technical evidence. A Slough Town Resident Association had been established. There was some input from businesses but this was not conclusive without more extensive consultation;
- a Town Leaders Team headed by the Chief Executive, which included communication representatives, had been established;
- discussions would be mindful of maintaining the character of Slough and avoiding gentrification.

Resolved – That

1. the activities taking place in Slough Town Centre to improve the public realm and resident/visitor experience be noted;
2. that the joint statement agreed by British Land and Slough Borough Council regarding ongoing work on the emerging Town Centre Masterplan be noted;
3. an information item with any updates be submitted as appropriate.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Panel reviewed its work programme and

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

31 October 2019– High Street Redevelopment Update (Information only)
 Voids Update (Information only)

14 January 2020- Car Clubs
Osborne – missed appointments

27 March 2020 - Key Worker Housing Update (Information only)

9. Members' Attendance Record

The Members received the Members' attendance records and

RESOLVED: That the Members' Attendance Record be amended to note that Councillor Matloob was present at the meeting on 24 June 2019 and not Councillor Ali who was no longer a member of the Panel.

10. Date of Next Meeting - 31 October 2019

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 31 October 2019.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.35pm and closed at 9.00pm)

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Scrutiny Panel

DATE: Thursday, 31st October 2019

CONTACT OFFICER: Colin Moone, Service Lead, Housing (People) Services
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 474057

WARD(S): All

PART I
FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

HMO AND SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEMES UNDER THE HOUSING ACT 2004

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To provide to the Panel a progress report on the implementation of the property licensing schemes introduced in Spring 2019 under the Housing Act 2004.

2. **Recommendation(s)/ Proposed Action**

2.1 The Panel is requested to note the summary of progress made so far in implementing the Licensing Schemes and to make any recommendations they deem appropriate to improve the efficacy of the schemes.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3a **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The thorough and effective licensing of HMOs and other privately rented properties directly supports the following priority:

- Housing

3b **Five Year Plan outcomes**

The licensing of HMOs is also a key element of the following outcomes of the Five Year Plan:

- Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay
- Our residents will live in good quality homes.

4. **Other Implications**

a) **Financial**

The financial implications of the licensing regime were discussed in detail in the report to Cabinet dated 18th March 2019. The Licensing fees in Slough are amongst the lowest in the UK but in order to incentivise landlords to come

forward, a commitment was made to offer an early bird discount to those landlords who made their licence application prior to 1st October 2019. This commitment was honoured and in order to assist landlords further the early bird discount was extended for a calendar month to 31st October 2019. This may have some impact on the Council's ability to cover the costs of the scheme.

b) Risk Management

There are no additional risks in addition to those listed within the Cabinet report.

c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

All policies and procedures introduced in relation to the licensing schemes have been formulated in accordance with relevant Legislation which has regard to Human Rights and is subject to legal scrutiny.

d) Equalities Impact Assessment

A detailed Equalities Impact Assessment was conducted during the consultation period and was submitted to Cabinet in March 2019 alongside the report recommending the implementation of the schemes.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 Following an extensive public consultation between November 2018 and January 2019, Slough Borough Council approved the proposal to implement two property Licensing Schemes under Parts 2 and 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to compliment the UK wide Mandatory Licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation which has been in place since 2006.

The necessary legal designations were made on 25th March 2019 and Public Notices were issued in accordance with the statutory requirements. Copies of the public notices of the designations can be found at the following location <https://www.slough.gov.uk/business/licences-and-permits/property-licensing.aspx>

5.2 The Housing Act 2004 allows a period of 3 months for legal challenges to any licensing designation made under that Act. No such challenges were made, and since 1st July 2019 the following Property Licensing Schemes have been in operation within Slough:

- Mandatory Licensing - This is a UK wide scheme that requires HMOs with 5 or more occupants to be licensed.
- Additional Licensing - This scheme applies to the whole of Slough borough and includes all HMOs which are not covered by the Mandatory Licensing Scheme.
- Selective Licensing - This applies to a specifically designated area (most of Chalvey and Central Wards) and covers all accommodation rented via an Assured shorthold tenancy or licence to occupy which is not an HMO i.e. let to one household.

5.3 The rationale and legal justification for introducing the schemes were set out in detail in the report to Cabinet in March 2019, but in summary the benefits of property Licensing are:

- Licensing schemes provide an effective policy framework to properly regulate and control the private rented sector;
- A property licensing scheme affords more protection to the most vulnerable tenants in the borough;
- Private tenants would have many more rights and protections when renting a licensed property, including written tenancy agreements and additional protections from eviction;
- Can deal with property related ASB at source e.g. by improving management and reducing rubbish/litter and fly tips;
- Opens up the use of civil penalties to deal with smaller HMOs and unlicensed selective properties;
- Identifies non-compliant landlords by their absence from the scheme and allows enforcement action to be targeted at the worst offenders rather than at the majority of compliant landlords;
- For licences, which have been granted the Council can charge an average fee for enforcement which will assist the Council in being able to afford effective enforcement of the sector
- Where housing defects are identified through licensing, landlords act more quickly to carry out repairs.

5.4 Progress to date

5.4.1 Headline figures

	Licence Type		
	Mandatory	Additional	Selective
Number of applications received	65	38	1269
Number of applications at draft licence stage	3	3	155
Number of final licences issued	14	10	213
Total Number of licensed (17/10/19)	127	10	213
Proportion of properties predicted to be licensable that are subject to an application (%)	5		36

5.4.2 The application process

In order to improve the efficiency of the Licensing application process, and to ensure that licensing application fees could be kept as low as possible, Slough Borough Council procured software which would allow applications and payments to be made electronically via an online system linked to Slough Borough Council's web pages.

The online application system was launched on 04th June 2019. The application is cloud based and can be accessed via the following link: <https://slough.metastreet.co.uk>. There is also a link on the Council's website.

Users are required to create an account using their email address; this account can then be used to make multiple applications. The user is able to commence the application process, save the information and return to the application later. The user is also able to make payment of the licence application fee online using a debit or credit card.

After the application has been processed by the Housing Regulation Team and the licensing documentation issued, the user can log in to their account at any time to review their documentation, update their details and upload any additional safety certification.

It is understood by the Council that some landlords struggle to use technology or have no access to IT. With this in mind Property Licensing Coordinators from the housing regulation team have invited a number of landlords to the Council offices in order to assist them to make their applications. This service has been provided at no extra cost to the landlord, and very positive feedback has been given by landlords about this service.

5.4.3 Enforcing the Licensing Schemes

In order to ensure the property licensing schemes achieve their objectives, they will need to be consistently and rigorously enforced. At the time the schemes were approved by Cabinet in March 2019, a commitment was made by the Housing Regulation Manager not to commence enforcing the schemes prior to the 1st October 2019. This deadline has now passed and the Housing Regulation Team are actively working with partners including Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Thames Valley Police, internal colleagues from the Resilience and Enforcement Team and others, to begin the process of enforcement.

Since the beginning of October 2019, the Housing Regulation Team has carried out the following:

- Applied for 2 warrants of entry under the Housing Act 2004
- Carried out 1 street based operation

These activities have all been undertaken alongside the housing regulation officers' ordinary day to day work, which involves responding to complaints about disrepair, unlawful eviction etc. and undertaking casework which assists the Council with its efforts to sustain private tenancies and reduce homelessness.

Where landlords fail to make licence applications, the strategy is to take a graduated approach to enforcement, in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy. This will usually involve inviting landlords with unlicensed properties to come forward and apply for a licence. If no such applications are received in response to the Council's warning, the Local Authority will consider the various enforcement options available to them including issuing Civil Penalty Notices of up to £30,000 or prosecution through the Magistrates Court.

Landlords who have a history of non - compliance, or those that have put the public at serious risk of harm are likely to be treated more robustly and where legally justifiable, these landlords may be subject to immediate enforcement action and have their licence applications refused or any current licences revoked.

5.4.4 Challenges and Successes

As anticipated a number of challenges have arisen in the first few months of the scheme's implementation:

- The online application system is new to all users including Council staff, so personnel have been through a period of learning and development. This has been undertaken during a period of high traffic through the online application system, as landlords rush to apply before the expiry of the early bird discount. However, the new application process is still far more efficient than the paper based system the Council were operating previously and is far more user friendly for landlords.
- Recruiting suitably qualified staff has historically been a challenge for the Housing Regulation Team due to the technical nature of the job role. To date one additional member of staff has been appointed, recruited internally, to assist with the processing of the applications. Solutions are being sought, with the support of senior managers and HR, to resolve the problem of understaffing within the Housing Regulation Team.
- In order to carry out operations effectively and safely, it is often necessary for the Local Authority to engage partners such as Thames Valley Police and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide support. Due to differing priorities and over-stretched resources, it can sometimes be a challenge to access the support needed in a timely and reliable manner and this can delay or undermine our enforcement activities in some areas. To overcome this, the Council has recently met with TVP inspectors to devise a mutually beneficial strategy for enforcing the Licensing schemes.
- Obtaining accurate and reliable information on the whereabouts of property owners and landlords is a logistical challenge due to the sheer number of privately rented properties affected by the schemes. Furthermore, concerns about data protection and privacy need to be addressed before any data is provided. As it is necessary to demonstrate a clear trail of communication directly with landlords for enforcement action to be taken, a lack of up to date contact information for landlords can lead to delays. However, progress has been made on this issue and a report has been commissioned which it is hoped will provide the data required.

As well as challenges the schemes are already conferring benefits:

- The publicity generated by the Licensing designations have raised the profile of the housing regulation service more generally so that tenants and landlords now understand what the service can and cannot do.
- Officers have been able to engage the professional landlords and letting agents, many of who we would never normally come across. This is important as through licensing we wish to encourage, support and promote good

landlords while targeting our enforcement resources on the rogue and criminal elements in the industry.

- The officers responsible for the implementation of the schemes are already beginning to work in a more intelligence-led and proactive way; as well as building relationships with other agencies. This will allow us to take a more holistic approach to improving housing, and the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities in Slough.

5.4.5 Future Priorities

- Procuring mobile inspection software to be used on site with a view to making the team smarter, more agile and efficient.
- Finding reliable ways to measure the effectiveness of the licensing schemes in order that they can be improved.
- Building on the already good relationship with Thames Valley Police and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and build a multi-agency team to tackle a wide range of problems in the private rented sector.
- Engaging tenants and communities so that they can provide us with information and intelligence concerning unlicensed and poorly managed properties.

6. Comments of Other Committees

The policy for the licensing of private rented property was an agenda item for Cabinet on 18th March 2019 when the schemes were approved. The Housing Regulation Manager is due to report to Cabinet in July 2020 on progress with the schemes.

This report has not been taken by other committees.

7. Conclusion

Though the Council has experienced some predictable teething problems with the implementation of the licensing schemes they are already proving a useful tool for identifying rogue landlords and poor properties and they are increasingly being recognised by other agencies, such as Thames Valley Police as key tools in solving some of the wider problems in Slough including crime and anti-social behaviour and health inequality.

8. Appendices

NA

9. Background Papers

Agenda Papers and Minutes, Cabinet (18th March 2019).

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Scrutiny Panel

DATE: Thursday, 31st October 2019

CONTACT OFFICER: Colin Moone, Service Lead, Housing (People) Services

(For all Enquiries) (01753) 474057

WARD(S): All

PART I
FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**HOUSING REPAIRS AND CUSTOMER CARE**1. **Purpose of Report**

To provide the Neighbourhood and Community Scrutiny Panel with an update on void performance.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the report for information and comment on it.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Housing is one of the key priorities of Slough's Joint Well Being Strategy (SJWS). It contributes to reducing inequalities in health through access to quality housing. There are clear links between housing and the JSNA priorities around improving health conditions so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities.

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Void management contributes specifically to four outcomes contained in the Council's Five Year Plan (2019-2024), namely:

- Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful
- Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs
- Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay
- Our residents will live in good quality homes

3c. The Housing Strategy

Slough's Housing Strategy 2016-2021 sets out the Council's shared vision and priorities to provide sufficient, good quality, affordable housing. The Housing Strategy is currently being reviewed and will be refreshed by January 2020.

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

Housing (People) Services (HPS) became responsible for the void budget in relation to the Repairs, Maintenance and Investment Contract (RMI). At the half year, there is a budget overspend reflecting a period when there has been a lot of properties that have become void, but which have been occupied by tenants for over 20 to 30 years. This has resulted in significant expenditure internally and externally, including garden clearances; major re-plastering: asbestos removal and four properties where previous tenants have concreted their gardens, but at different times leaving uneven and dangerous paths, patios, hard landscaping and large asbestos sheds, one in a dangerous condition.

HPS are working with Osborne to find ways to mitigate the risk of an overspend at the end of the financial year.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

Type of Risk	Risk	Current Controls	Score	Future Controls
Economic/Financial	Budget overspend	Daily specification of works/Budget monitoring/agreeing variations	15 Critical impact. High probability	Only using Schedule of Rates
Political	Reputational risk to council due to overspend	Budget monitoring & RMI Governance arrangements	12 Critical impact Significant probability	Review both operational and financial performance.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights or other Legal implications arising from this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The compilation of this report has not required an Equalities Impact Assessment.

(e) Workforce

There are no workforce implications.

5. Supporting Information

5.1 Voids

Voids and void management are standard housing activities in relation to secure and fixed term tenancies. Voids occur for a variety of reasons, including on death; transfer to another council property due to size of property need; adapted property; moving on to buy a property; move to another part of the country; abandonment of the property; taking advantage of an incentive to downsize; moved into residential care and evictions.

5.1.1 Voids Performance Scrutiny Overview Indicator

SOI 10 - Average re-let time in calendar days (V1 Minor, V2 Standard and V3 Major Work Voids)

This indicator has been reviewed and brought in line with what would be classed as the local authority industry standard for measuring void performance. This standard is based on the old BVPI 212, measuring the average re-let time (calendar days), which excludes any period of time a void property is in actual major works. The void period either side of the major works will be included in the calculation to obtain the average re-let time. The period taken into account for a V3 is the date a tenancy terminates through to the date the tenancy recommences, as shown on the tenancy agreement, less the amount of time the property was subject to major repair. For V1 and V2's, calculation is the same as V3, but no deductions for major repairs.

Void types excluded from the average re-let time calculation include:-

- V4 Capital voids
- Long term management hold void including insurance, major works, pending disposal.
- Operational voids
- Any properties where a formal decision has been made to sell or demolish.

The categories for voids listed in the RMI contract are defined as follows:

Category	Scope of Work	Target Time
Priority 'V1' Minor void works	Lock change clear out, clean, meter readings, services tests (gas, water, electrical), visual asbestos check, decoration of kitchen, bathroom, hall stairs and landing in white emulsion.	Within 5 working days
Priority 'V2' Standard void works	Standard void repairs as described in the Lettable Void Standard	Within 10 working days
Priority 'V3' Major void works	Internal refurbishment of a void property to the Slough Standard.	Within 20 working days

Priority 'V4'	To be instructed from time to time by the Council with works to include structural repairs, damp treatment, roof and window repairs / replacement as necessary.	Works to be completed within agreed deadlines
Capital voids		
Complete internal and external refurbishment	Works to be completed within agreed deadlines subject to the extent of work required	

In addition, there are other categories, which have been developed since the RMI Contract started and account for a small number of voids.

Category	Scope of Work	Target Time
Long Term Management Hold/Insurance/Major Works to be carried out under Programmed works/ pending disposal.	Property held for a specific allocation or due to a refurbishment project, where keeping it void is best solution. Property subject to insurance work resulting from fire or subsidence Property has been left in a state which requires such significant expenditure that it is done as programmed capital works. Strategic decision to dispose.	Actions to be completed within agreed deadlines
Operational void	This could be a new property being prepared for its first let or a property that could be being used outside of tenanted use by the council.	Works to be completed within agreed deadlines
To be demolished	A property that has become void and is being held as such in advance of possible demolition.	

5.1.2 Performance reporting 2019/20

Q1 Average re-let time

Void type	No of Props	Count of void days	Ave void days
V1-Minor voids	1	92	92
V2-Standard Voids	9	821	91
V3-Major Works Void	39	1633 *	42
Q1 Average re-let time	49	2546	52

* Does not include time in major works

Q2 Average re-let time

Void type	No of Props	Count of void days	Ave void days
V1-Minor voids	0	0	0
V2-Standard Voids	4	207	52
V3-Major Works Void	40	1772*	44
Q2 Average re-let time	44	1979	45

* Does not include time in major works

Average re-let time standard void

Time frame	No of Props	Count of void days	Ave void days
Q1	9	821	91
Q2	4	207	52
Year to date	13	1028	79

5.1.3 Volume of Voids

The table below shows the void volume over the past 12 months for secure and fixed term tenancies.

October 2018 – September 2019

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
New voids	32	19	24	25	20	16	24	15	26	25	23	34	283
Voids Let	24	29	38	18	13	35	28	11	17	21	21	29	284

5.1.4 Letting of Void Properties

There is a variety of legislation which has to be taken into account when letting properties with a fixed term of less than 7 years. The most recent legislation is the Homes (Fit for Human Habitations) Act 2018 and applies to landlords including councils. This means when a property is let, it needs to take account of this legislation. Tenants can use the Act to legally challenge the council should the property not be fit for human habitation.

The void process involves the council and Osborne, as the council's repairs, maintenance and investment contractor. Osborne's role is to carry out the repair work when the property is void, to bring it up to a condition that is lettable, that allows a new tenant to move in safely.

The circumstances in which a property becomes void are numerous, which involve a variety of processes before keys can be given to Osborne. Examples over and above a standard void, which is where a tenant gives notice, a pre-void inspection is carried out to determine the likely amount of work needed, and explanation is given of the Council's re-charge policy on vacation. At the end of the void period, the tenant returns the keys to the council and the property is in a good state of repair. The keys are given to Osborne who carry out a joint inspection with council Technical Inspectors to determine

the specification. Allocations are advised so that they can identify suitable applicants for the property. The work is carried out, progress being monitored through weekly void meetings and dialogue between Osborne and council's technical team. Once completed, a joint property inspection is carried out and property is signed off as being fit to let. A viewing is held with a suitable applicant, and a signing of the tenancy agreement at the earliest opportunity.

There are numerous vagaries, which have to be managed within the process by council staff; Osborne when carrying out the void work and the unpredictability of applicants.

Examples of these vagaries include uncooperative tenants who will not give access to allow a pre-void inspection; evictions resulting in trashed property; gardens full of rubbish that the tenant has decided not to dispose of; asbestos riddled properties which require a full asbestos removal process; residents passes away with no relatives, so a 28 day Notice to Quit has to be issued to the Public Trustee before action can be taken to the property; property requires replacement kitchens and bathrooms with decisions on incorporating into planned programmes or replacing as part of void works; gardens that need work due to concrete patios and paths presenting health and safety risks; applicants who are very positive about taking a tenancy, and then decide to refuse, resulting in a further allocation to be made; and due to the extensive nature of some work, agreement by the council to additional costs.

5.1.5 Improvement to Void Performance

Over the past 12 months, there has been active working together by council and Osborne officers to make improvements to the voids process; minimise void costs; and minimise costs of bringing voids back into management and available to let. Reasons for this include:

- Being able to let properties more quickly.
- Ensure properties are let to a standard which is fit for human habitation.
- Able to rehouse people in temporary accommodation more quickly, resulting in improved accommodation for them, cost saving to the council, and providing vacant accommodation for new homeless people.
- Minimising rent loss, enabling more income to be spent on tenancy sustainment benefitting new and existing tenants who need additional support in managing their tenancies.
- Minimise council tax payments for these void periods, giving flexibility to spend on non recoverable services for tenants.
- Able to favourably benchmark with other local authorities

To achieve this, the following actions are being taken. These include:

- Improving the IT monitoring processes
- Constant monitoring of voids through weekly joint meetings

- Staff trained to ensure internal processes are timely actioned
- Ensuring keys are passed between the council and Osborne as efficiently as possible.
- Discussions with Environmental Services to assist with clearing gardens.

Redefining of the agreed Lettable Standard in the RMI Contract for Osborne to work to has been reviewed and is in the process of being firmed up on. The Lettable Standard is a document that commits the council to provide a new letting at a standard that a new tenant can move into. It takes into account the cost of bringing a property back into occupation.

This may mean the new tenant has to decorate all or part of the property themselves, but where the council has agreed decoration vouchers to enable them to acquire the materials they require including paint, brushes etc to provide wall colours and papering of their own choice; Gardens will be cleared of detritus, overgrown bushes, grass cut to a level that allows a new tenant to be responsible for the ongoing care and maintenance; and internally and externally, health and safety risks are mitigated.

The property will be let as being fit for human habitation. This may mean the property is decorated wholly, partially or not at all.

Focussing on reducing void times, council and Osborne officers are meeting to jointly explore ways in which the void process can be made more efficient; improving the specification process linked to cost control. Separately, council officers are looking at different applicant viewing arrangements including multiple viewings.

The revised Lettable Standard will be passed via the Residents Board for comment.

6. **Comments of Other Committees**

None.

7. **Conclusion**

The report is for information only and therefore, for noting. However, the void's issue is important for many reasons and officers continue to work at getting processes more effective and efficient.

8. **Background Papers**

None.

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 31 October 2019

CONTACT OFFICER: Difaf Sharba, Policy Insight Analyst
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 875411

WARDS: All

PART I
FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

NEIGHBOURHOODS & COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL
2019/20 WORK PROGRAMME

1. **Purpose of Report**

For the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (NCS Scrutiny Panel) to discuss its work programme for 2019-20.

2. **Recommendations/Proposed Action**

That the panel review the work programme and potential items listed for inclusion.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3.1 The Council's decision-making and the effective scrutiny of it underpins the delivery of all the Joint Slough Wellbeing Strategy priorities. The NCS Scrutiny Panel, along with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and other Scrutiny Panels combine to meet the local authority's statutory requirement to provide public transparency and accountability, ensuring the best outcomes for the residents of Slough.

3.2 The work of the NCS Scrutiny Panel also reflects the priorities of the Five Year Plan, in particular the following:

- Our residents will have access to good quality homes

3.3 In particular, the NCS Scrutiny Panel specifically takes responsibility for ensuring transparency and accountability for Council services relating to housing, regeneration and environment, and safer communities.

4. **Supporting Information**

4.1 The current work programme is based on the discussions of the NCS Scrutiny Panel at previous meetings, looking at requests for consideration of issues from officers and issues that have been brought to the attention of Members outside of the Panel's meetings.

4.2 The work programme is a flexible document which will be continually open to review throughout the municipal year.

5. **Conclusion**

This report is intended to provide the NCS Scrutiny Panel with the opportunity to review its upcoming work programme and make any amendments it feels are required.

6. **Appendices Attached**

A - Work Programme for 2019/20 Municipal Year

7. **Background Papers**

None.

Neighbourhood and Community Services Scrutiny Panel Work Programme - 2019/20

Task & finish group
•
Meeting Date
31 October 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation • High Street Redevelopment Update (information only) • Voids Update (information only)
28 November 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low emission strategy update (particularly on electric car charging points)/car clubs • Local plan update • Housing strategy update
14 January 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Home Improvement Agency - findings of the review • Housing rents and Service Charges update • Market Lane Road/Hollow Hill Lane Network and the impact on Langley - update from Network Rail • Osborne – Missed appointments

27 March 2020

- Impact of the redevelopment of the leisure facilities - community
- Five Year Plan Outcome 4 progress
- Key Worker Housing Update (information only)
- Crime and disorder reduction panel
 - Safer Slough Partnership Update

1 April 2020

- Housing Services Scrutiny Indicators
-

To be programmed:

- Homeless Prevention Strategy
- Rough Sleeper Action Plan

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD

NEIGHBOURHOODS & COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL 2019 – 20

COUNCILLOR	MEETING DATES						
	24/06/2019	05/09/2019	31/10/2019	28/11/2019	14/01/2020	27/02/2020	01/04/2020
N. Holledge	Ab	Ab					
Gahir	P	P*					
S Parmar	P	P					
Plenty	P	P					
Ajaib	P	Ap					
Matloob	P	P					
Hulme	Ap	P					
Minhas	P	P*					
Wright	P	P					

P = Present for whole meeting
Ap = Apologies given

P* = Present for part of meeting
Ab = Absent, no apologies given

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