

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2019.

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

Also present : Mr Pollard (Residents Panel Board)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Minhas

Absent: Mr Matharu and Mr Watkins

PART 1

31. Declarations of Interest

Agenda item 5 – Low Emissions Strategy Update (EV Network & Car Clubs)

Councillor Gahir declared an interest in that he was a taxi driver.

32. Minutes of the last meeting held on 31 October 2019

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2019 be approved as a correct record.

33. Member Questions

Members noted the tabled responses to the two Member questions in relation to Airbnb and Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

In relation to Airbnb, a Member stated that there were 169 planning violations but it appeared that no action had been taken.

Members considered the response to the IMD question and discussed concerns in relation to crime, barriers to housing and services and those areas of Slough that had historically been deprived but were not listed. A Member indicated that it would be beneficial to hear what action the Council had taken in areas that had been 'deprived' for 10 years, such as Britwell and Chalvey, and how effective that action had been.

Resolved – That

- (a) reports on Airbnb and IMD be submitted to the Panel; and
- (b) the responses to the Members' questions, as tabled, be noted.

34. Food Hygiene

The Panel received a report which provided information on the hygiene risk rating of food businesses and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and reassessment of scores.

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Levine Whitham, Food and Safety Manager, gave a presentation which outlined the content of the report. Members made comments and asked a series of questions which were responded to as follows:-

- In terms of low risk premises, the Food Standards Agency advice was that alternative enforcement strategies, such as a questionnaire, could be used;
- Retailers were permitted to sell products that had gone past their 'best before' date on a reduced basis but not after the 'sell by' or 'use by' date due to the microbiological risk. It was expected that a consumer would check products such as fresh fruit and vegetables prior to purchase;
- 100% of Category B and C inspections would be completed by February 2020;
- Premises/ businesses could only be closed down via a Court Order and evidence was required of a public health risk. A Hygiene Improvement Notice could be issued to premises if there were concerns. The officer emphasised that a business could still operate whilst it was the subject of investigation/ was going through the Court process but that the team would work with the business to make improvements.
- There were currently 6 part time inspectors and 2 contractors. The officer reassured Members that contractors appointed met the qualification criteria and explained that the first inspections undertaking were quality assured.

The Chair thanked the officers for their work in this area.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

35. Low Emission Strategy Update (EV Network and Car Clubs)

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the low emission strategy (LES) including electric car charging points and car clubs. Jason Newman, Environmental Quality Team Manager, outlined the content of the report and tabled appendix B, Outline Low Emissions Delivery Plan, which had been omitted from the agenda pack. In response a Member's concern at the lack of car clubs and lack of provision for on street car charging points, he explained that funding for car clubs had been secured over a number of years and that it was intended to initiate the car club programme from 2020. The programme would run over several years and its success and expansion would depend on the level of funding secured. There had been discussions with a car club operator but to set up the car club will be costly and it is necessary to use capital borrowing. In terms of EV charging points, the officer advised that on street charging points were an issue due to energy supply and enforcement considerations if funding were to be pursued. Savio DeCruz, Service Lead – Major Infrastructure Projects, added that road space was an issue and that the Parking officers were looking into this. A Member questioned whether charging points could be built into the existing infrastructure and was advised that, whilst the technology for a lamp post charging point did exist, that parking enforcement to enable car drivers wishing to park charge their car was a key factor. In addition, superfast

charging was now starting to be rolled out but not all EV cars would be able to use this technology; all new EVs would be able if their battery management system enabled them to use the technology.

In response to a Member's question, an officer advised that the current estimated cost of the low emission programme was over £10m and that, to date, Slough had secured S106 contributions just over £200,000 with a potential of a further £400,000-£1,000,000 in the pipeline. Whilst there was commercial interest in Slough to progress the programme, it was unlikely that all the Section 106 monies required would be secured to meet the full cost of the programme, and therefore there is a need for private/public funding initiatives, Government grants and capital borrowing.

A Member expressed concern that the strategy did not give any recognition to those individuals who used public transport, cycled or walked and suggested that it might be more beneficial to improve public transport in Slough. She added that those residents in poor quality housing without off street parking would not see any benefit. The officer acknowledged that modal shift away from the use of the car was required and was one of the main themes of the transport vision. The Service Lead – Major Infrastructure Projects added that there was 100% focus on public transport and that the vision was to have less parking, an MRT through the town centre, improved bus connectivity and services and more infrastructure for car clubs.

In response to Members questions and comments, the officers advised:-

- The Corporate Management Team had approved the recruitment of two members of staff to progress the following low emission programmes, electric taxis, EV charging network and car clubs;
- Grant funding of up to £500 is available to residents who wished to install an electric vehicle charging point via the Government's Homecharge scheme;
- Significant consultation on the Lansdown Avenue junction had be carried out and the closure was unlikely to be removed; there had been no casualties since the closure;
- The Council subsidised bus services in Slough by approximately £150,000 pa excluding concessions;
- A feasibility study on the possible introduction of a Clean Air Zone in Slough was being carried out in 2020, subject to funding.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

36. Local Plan Update

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the review of the Local Plan for Slough.

Phillipa Hopkins, Principal Policy Planner, outlined the content of the report and progress on key elements in the emerging spatial strategy (interim framework for the centre of slough, Heathrow Airport Expansion, the

consideration of the northern expansion in the submission of the Chiltern Local Plan, and the reduction in the housing supply).

One Member asked what had changed that there was a five year supply and now there wasn't. The officer explained this was a combination of reasons and the Housing Action Plan provided an analysis as to why Slough no longer had a five year housing land supply and strategic methods to remedy this. A Member questioned whether the lack of 5 year housing supply would mean the size of rooms and number of windows in accommodation would be compromised. The officer advised that she did not have detailed knowledge; this level of detail would be dealt with at Planning Application stage e.g. for the Case Officer to negotiate. The Permitted Development right to convert offices to residential did mean that there was less control, however. Detailed knowledge of this would require a development management expert. In response, another Member expressed the view that if an officer was unable to attend the meeting or provide detailed answers, the agenda item should be withdrawn.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

37. Housing Strategy Update Report

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the progress of the new Housing Strategy and presented the emerging themes. An appendix detailing the current waiting list size for Council accommodation was tabled. Colin Moone, Service Lead – Housing (People) Services introduced the report and reminded Members that the deadline for submission of their comments on the Strategy was Friday 6 December 2019. The aim was to complete the final strategy by March 2020. Maggie Rafalowicz, Housing Consultant, reiterated that comments on the strategy would be welcomed and once received the document would be updated. An action plan would also be produced. A Member requested the definitions of 'Slough Living Rent' and 'Affordable Rent' and in terms of affordability, figures in terms of the cost of a house in the borough and neighbouring boroughs compared to average income. The officer explained that in previous years, affordable housing was 80% of the market rent so a Slough Living rent was produced which was below market rent. He explained that the Council was not currently catering for key workers or young people and that a number of 'products' were required in order to meet the needs of the community. Land values may deter developers from coming to Slough as grant rates were lower than in London. He added that there was a housing problem in the Borough and therefore height and density of accommodation and the large private rented sector would need to be considered. The strategy suggested how housing issues could be addressed.

In response to a Member's question, the officer advised that some residents, including those that had found themselves homeless, had been housed in temporary accommodation outside the borough. Although it was not currently Council policy to house residents permanently out of borough, this policy was to be reviewed.

Resolved- That the report be noted.

38. Asbestos report (for information)

The Panel received a report which provided information on the current status of asbestos within the Housing Revenue Account Housing Stock and the number of properties where asbestos had been removed. In response to questions as to who carried out surveys and removed asbestos, Colin Moone, Service Lead – Housing (People) Services reassured the Panel that asbestos was dealt with by the Council's contractor, Osbornes, who were fully qualified in this field of work. If more specialist work was required, the Council would appoint appropriate licensed contractors. A representative of the Residents Panel Board requested details of the contractors / analysts undertaking surveys and asbestos removal and suggested that this be monitored regularly by the Panel.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

39. Forward Work Programme

The Panel reviewed the current work programme.

Resolved – That

- (a) a report on Airbnb be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel;
- (b) a report on Indices of Multiple Deprivation be submitted to the Panel in the next municipal year; and
- (c) the work programme be noted.

40. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20

Resolved – That, subject to noting that Councillor M Holledge was a member of the Panel, the attendance record be noted.

41. Date of Next Meeting - 14 January 2020

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.04 pm).

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