

## **Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 30th July, 2024**

**Present:-** Councillors Hulme (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Dauti, Matloob, O’Kelly, W. Sabah, Satti and Tomar

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Mohindra and Shah

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillors Stedmond and Rana

### **PART 1**

#### **62. Declarations of Interest**

At the outset of the meeting the Chair advised that the running order of items 5,6 and 7 shown on the published agenda had changed due to limitations of Officers’ availability for item 7. This meant that item 6 (CISC Work Programme 2024-25) would now become item 5, item 7 (Launching a Task and Finish Panel) would now become item 6 and item 5 (Discretionary Property Licensing) would now become item 7.

Councillors Ajaib, Matloob, Sabah and Tomar each declared a Pecuniary Interest on the newly numbered item 7 (Discretionary Property Licensing) on the grounds that they or a close family member were landlords in the Borough. They would therefore leave the meeting for that item.

#### **63. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024**

**Resolved –** That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024 be approved as a correct record.

#### **64. Members' Attendance Record 2024-25**

As this was the first meeting of the municipal year 2024/25 the members’ attendance record was empty. The document would be updated after each meeting, beginning with tonight’s meeting.

#### **65. Election of Members to the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee's (CISC) pool of designated chairs**

Members considered a report which set out proposals for the establishment of a ‘pool of designated chairs’ to chair scrutiny task and finish sub-groups for the 2024/25 municipal year. Up to five members of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) could be appointed to act as designated chairs.

The Committee was also invited to appoint a Chair from this new pool of chairs and three members to the task group on Children’s engagement with

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families, children and other key communities. This task group had been agreed at the meeting of CISC in March 2024 but owing to a number of circumstances there had been a delay in setting up the task group

Members put forward several nominations to the task and finish sub-groups which were agreed.

### Resolved -

1. That Councillors Ajaib, Hulme, Kelly, Rana and Stedmond be appointed to act as designated Chairs of task and finish subgroups of the Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year
2. That Councillor Rana be appointed Chair and Councillors Matloob and Mohindra be appointed as members of the Children's engagement with families, children and other key communities Task Group.

## 66. Discretionary Property Licensing

*(Having declared an interest, Councillors Ajaib, Matloob, Sabah and Tomar left the meeting at 7.10pm. Following the conclusion of this item the Chair agreed to a temporary adjournment of the meeting in order for the Officer to check to see if Councillors Ajaib, Matloob, Sabah and Tomar were still in the building and wanted to return to the meeting. The Officer having checked that they were no longer in the building, the Chair then announced that the meeting was closed (this item being the last substantive item on the agenda.)*

The Chair welcomed Councillor Shah, Cabinet Member for Equalities, Public Health and Public Protection, who introduced the report.

The report provided an update on the Council's two discretionary property licensing schemes for private rented accommodation which became operative in July 2019, following designations made under Sections 56 and 80 of the Housing Act. The discretionary schemes were introduced to facilitate the improvement of housing conditions and to tackle poor property management which was shown to be contributing to higher rates of anti-social behaviour in areas with a high density of privately rented accommodation and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

The report set out progress towards the schemes' outcomes and the proposed a course of action for the future of property licensing in Slough, when the current Additional and Selective licensing scheme ceased operating on 30 June 2024.

Appendix 1 provided detailed information on the outputs and outcomes from the Additional and Selective licensing schemes. The report suggested that although there had been some challenges to the delivery of the schemes, it had brought some measurable benefits to residents.

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The report provided information about the fee structure until 31 March 2024 which accompanied the licence applications. Although there were significant up-front costs associated with setting up new schemes, the costs were fully recoverable through licensing fees and cost fees would be built into the financial modelling.

The Committee was advised that a report would go to Cabinet meeting on 16 September 2024 with recommendations for the future of property licensing in Slough. The report would set out the indicative costs and time frames for implementation of the licensing schemes.

The Committee discussed the report and sought clarification from Officers. The main points emerging from the discussion included the following:

- Problems with anti-social behaviour in and around Chalvey remained, which appear to be linked to some privately rented properties. Some of the conditions of those properties were in poor condition.
- There was concern about the Council's case management system which meant that some of the data was subject to error and it was not possible to measure outcomes. Officers advised that Arcus had replaced the Council's legacy case management system Civica App. Officers were currently working on the current system.
- There was significant variation across other local authorities as to how much they charged for delivering the schemes. Officers would work closely with finance to ensure that the fees were appropriate for full cost recovery.
- There were resourcing issues in delivering the property licensing schemes in Slough, partly due to a national skills shortage in environmental health officers.
- The indicative costs for the stock-modelling was likely to be in the region of £25,000 to £30,000, depending on the provider user.
- Tenants may not know their rights and how to challenge the behaviour of their landlords.
- There was support for a tenancy advocacy system. This could include creating a tenants' forum.
- The suggestion of the revival of the landlords' forum was welcomed – the forum could be useful in sharing knowledge and skills as well as introducing any new discretionary schemes.
- The Council proactively publicised cases where there have been successful prosecutions against landlords. It would take an active role in promoting and advertising any new Licensing Schemes – primarily to educate landlords.
- The existing licensing scheme was indirectly linked to the Council's corporate parenting function in that a number of care leavers were sometimes placed in 'supported living' or 'exempt accommodation' which were often HMOs.
- The data showed that the number of privately rented properties in Slough had increased. In addition, the census data showed that apart from four wards in Slough which were below the English average

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percentage of the number of privately rented properties per ward (18.5%), the rest were above that average. Some of the wards were significantly above the average. This meant that the first of the statutory requirement for Selective Licensing Designations was met for the remaining wards. There was also an increase in rent to rent accommodation. There was therefore scope for extending the scheme, albeit further analysis was required.

The Committee recognised the importance of the licensing schemes in contributing to the improvement of housing conditions in the designated areas. It considered that extending the scheme on a phased basis to cover the whole of the Borough was needed, in view of the increase in the private rented sector and to make the scheme cost-effective.

The Committee also indicated that it wished to be kept informed of future developments on a regular basis, and to have opportunity to view the scheme options to be put prior to Cabinet's final decision in 2025.

The Committee, having discussed the matter, unanimously agreed to the recommendations set out below.

**Resolved:**

1. That the contribution of the licensing schemes to the improvement of housing conditions in designated areas be noted.
2. That the learning from the significant challenges faced by the housing regulation team in delivering the schemes be noted.

**Recommendations to Cabinet:**

1. That the feasibility of extending the discretionary scheme to the whole of the Borough in a phased approach, including an application to the Secretary of State, be considered.
2. That during the inter-scheme period residents are also consulted, to be member led in areas, and include in person events and resident groups.
3. That in the design of a new scheme, the Council includes a provision for publicising the scheme and the impact of the scheme.
4. That CISC be given the opportunity to scrutinise the scheme options prior to Cabinet's final decision in 2025.
5. That adequate systems for the recording and monitoring of performance be a pre-requisite for any future designations.
6. That a renewed 'Stock Modelling' exercise be undertaken to establish whether the statutory conditions for further designations are met; and to use the derived data alongside experience gained from the delivery of the existing designations, to design a scheme or schemes that effectively

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contribute to the objectives of the Corporate Plan relating to health inequalities.

**67. CISC Work Programme 2024-25**

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which set out the draft work programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) (see Appendix D to the report). The report set out how Members and Officers had shaped the draft work programme over the course of three committee workshops in May and June 2024. There would be three main categories of scrutiny work/proposals to build into the forward plan for 2024-25 which were as follows:

1. Scrutiny topics identified by residents and members
2. Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget setting for 2025-26 and in year financial management and performance; and
3. Scrutiny of significant strategy, policy and service developments proposed by Officers based on their plans for the coming year.

Details of each of the categories, including aims and objectives, were set in Appendix A.

Members noted that the draft Work Programme would continue to change as the year progressed. There were no amendments to the Work Programme.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that in respect of the topic “PCC and Chief Constable” attending the CISC meeting for 29 October 2024, Officers were currently reviewing the Committee’s duties under the appropriate legislation as to whether the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) fell under the remit of CISC or under the remit of the Police and Crime Panel. Should this topic not go ahead for the CISC meeting in October 2024, it was likely that the vacant slot would be filled with an item on public health. Members indicated that they were keen to ensure that CISC maintained a role in scrutinising the work of the PCC as well as the Slough Commander and Thames Valley Police.

Officers agreed to clarify the position regarding the PCC’s roles and responsibilities and to provide an update at the next meeting. Alternatively, members would be notified in writing, should a response be received before that date.

**Resolved** – That the Work Programme at Appendix D be agreed.

**68. Launching a Task and Finish Panel to scrutinise in-year budget management and planning budget for 2025/26**

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The Committee considered a report which set out arrangements for the launching of a CISC Task and Finish Panel to scrutinise the Council's in-year budget management and planning budget/medium term financial strategy for 2025-26.

The report recommended a small Task and Finish Panel of between 3 to 4 members which would operate over several months, engaging with senior officers in finance and the directorates. The Panel would provide timely informal updates to CISC as well as formal reports in accordance with the committee's forward plan. It was anticipated that the maximum timeline for the Panel would be nine months.

Appendix A set out the draft scope of the Task and Finish Panel.

The Interim Executive Director: Finance and Commercial and the Interim Finance Director provided an overview of the key areas of work of the proposed Task and Finish Panel. The work would provide Members of the Budget Task and Finish Panel with an opportunity to go through key aspects of the budget. Officers advised that having a small Budget Task and Finish Panel to scrutinise the budget had been successful at other local authorities. It was envisaged that Members would be provided with training on local government finances as well as being offered peer support. Further, it was anticipated that the Budget Task and Finish Panel would meet on a monthly basis but there could be some flexibility as to the times when meetings took place.

Members welcomed the launch of a new Budget Task and Finish Panel and saw it a positive way of moving forward with the challenging economic environment. The approach was also seen as a way of providing greater transparency.

Officers advised that it was open for the membership of the Budget Task and Finish Panel to comprise members from outside of the CISC, although it was anticipated that on this occasion the membership would comprise four members of the CISC.

**Resolved –**

1. That the launch of a 'Budget Management and Development Task and Finish Panel' as set out in section 3 of the report and working to the draft scope as set in Appendix A be approved.
2. That Councillor Stedmond be appointed as Chair of the Budget Management and Development Task and Finish Panel and Councillors Ajaib, Hulme and O'Kelly be appointed as members of the Budget Management and Development Task and Finish Panel.
3. That a decision to extend the maximum timeline for the Panel to 9 months be formally approved by the Chair at the next meeting in September 2024 as an 'any other business' arising from these minutes.

**69. Date of Next Meeting - 24 September 2024**

The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was confirmed as 24 September 2024.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.36 pm and closed at 8.18 pm)