

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Hulme (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Gahir, Matloob, Minhas, S Parmar, Sabah and Co-optee Trevor Pollard

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Nazir and Strutton

PART 1

13. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Hulme and Minhas declared that they were Council representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. They remained logged in throughout the virtual meeting.

Councillor Gahir declared that he was a Hackney Carriage driver. He remained logged in throughout the virtual meeting.

In relation to Minute No. 18 Langley High Street, Infrastructure - Councillors Matloob and Strutton declared that they were members of the Council's Trustee Committee. They remained logged in throughout the virtual meeting.

14. Minutes of the last meeting held on 22nd June 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd June 2020 be approved a correct record.

15. Member Questions

None had been received.

16. Repairs Maintenance and Investment (RMI) Contract Update

Councillor Nazir (Cabinet Member for Housing & Community Safety) introduced a report that provided an update regarding Osborne's delivery of the Repairs Maintenance and Investment (RMI) Contract.

The Service Lead, Housing Development & Contracts highlighted that the report included information that had been requested at the previous Panel meeting.

In attendance was Mr Hughes, Osborne Account Director. Mr Hughes was invited to comment on the information presented. He highlighted that Osborne RMI 2019/20 Annual Report was appended to the report and invited comments and questions from the Panel.

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

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

- Referring to the 'Risk Management' section of the report, a Member queried why the backlog of maintenance repairs had not been listed as a significant risk. It was explained that the governance structure set out in the contract provided a formal basis to raise issues regarding performance. The Council adopted a 'partnership approach' and Osborne had provided an Improvement Plan to address the backlog of repairs. The issue was considered a 'medium risk' due to the proposed control measures offered by Osborne. If the backlog of repairs continued to increase the matter would be escalated and considered a significant risk.
- Mr Hughes explained that although the data appeared to show an increasing number of outstanding repairs, this was due to the system requiring a 'data cleanse' rather than actual works requiring action. He estimated that approximately 500 of the repairs listed would be removed from the system once the data cleanse had been completed.
- The initial findings of the Independent Audit Agent (IAA) review of performance data supplied by Osborne had raised significant concern regarding its validity. Osborne had failed to provide data to substantiate a number of its performance results. It was reported that the IAA would be continuing to monitor performance to ensure all data provided was consistent and factual. A report detailing the full findings of the IAA review would be available during September 2020 and would be shared with the Panel.
- The Independent Chair of the Resident Board commented that residents had little faith in the accuracy of the performance reports or the feedback from satisfaction surveys. He said the 99% resident satisfaction rate presented was not credible and did not reflect the experience of residents he was in contact with.
- Concern was raised that resident satisfaction was collected by a trade person via a handheld device. It was highlighted that this method was open to manipulation and could allow the trade person to complete the survey themselves.
- In relation to the backlog of repairs, it was asked how many of these cases involved urgent repairs. Mr Hughes agreed to provide further details to the Panel following the meeting.
- Concerns were raised about Osborne's call answering times, the standard of customer service and the ability of call centre staff to effectively handle queries. In addition, it was asked why calls had been diverted to a Manchester centre despite the RMI contract stipulating that calls would be managed at Hawker House in Slough. It was explained that a Manchester call centre was used to manage out of hours calls, and as a contingency option.

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

- It was noted that a number of resident complaints were being escalated to Stage 3 rather than being effectively managed at Stage 1. It was explained that the Housing Ombudsman was reviewing the complaints procedure and consideration would be given to how best to involve residents in the process.
- The Panel noted that Social Return on Investment (SROI) was an essential part of the contract's service delivery. This included: employing local labour and establishing a supply chain strategy; providing apprenticeships and work placements; and the reinvestment of Slough money. It was agreed that details of Osborne's (SROI) would be provided to Members.
- Discussion took place in relation to joint resident and officer estates inspections being carried out; it was agreed that additional details would be provided to the Panel.
- In view of legislative changes, it was asked how many fire doors had been replaced and the number of replacements outstanding. It was agreed that this information would be provided to the Panel.

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

Councillor Strutton suggested that the current method used to record tenants' satisfaction with repairs be reviewed. He raised concern regarding the accuracy of data held by Osborne and highlighted that if data was being effectively managed a 'data cleanse' would not be necessary. He commented that remedial works were not undertaken in a timely manner and raised concerns about the impacts on the health and safety of tenants. Further concerns were raised in relation to: the poor standard of caretaking in communal areas; building defects remaining unrepaired for a significant length of time; and storm damage insurance claims not being dealt with correctly.

The Service Lead, Housing (People) Services explained that estates inspections had been temporary suspended during the lockdown period, but had now been resumed and any estate repairs required would be completed. There was discussion in relation to estate officers and residents undertaking joint inspections.

In concluding the discussion on the item the Chair thanked the officers and Resident Board representatives for attending the meeting.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report and Osborne's 2019/20 Annual Report be noted.

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

- (b) That additional details regarding Osborne's plan to tackle the backlog of responsive repairs be circulated to the Panel.
- (c) That an extraordinary Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel meeting be scheduled to receive a further update from Osborne, including details of the following:
 - Outstanding repairs backlog
 - Results of the residents survey
 - Findings of the Independent Audit Agent report
 - Either a copy of the revised complaints process/procedure or an update on it
 - An update on Osborne's Forward Plan, detailed in section 4.1 of the Financial Report. With particular emphasis on their Social Return on Investment plans
 - Plan for the joint residents/officer estates inspections

17. Resident Board Feedback Reports

The Panel noted the Resident Board feedback provided within the reports.

Resolved – That the reports be noted.

18. Langley High Street, Infrastructure - Impact on Businesses

The Network Management Engineer introduced a report that set out the plans to transform Langley High Street, and the adjacent infrastructure. Members were also provided with the rationale for the scheme and details relating to the expected impact of the proposed scheme on local business and services in the locality.

(At this point in the meeting Councillor Minhas declared that Langley High Street was in her ward – she remained logged in throughout the virtual meeting)

The Chair invited comments and questions from the Panel.

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

- A series of online public consultation sessions had been held during August 2020, via the Council's video conferencing facility. Residents and business owners had been invited to receive an update on the next stage

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

of the road improvement works and to indicate their preferred option for changes to Langley High Street. The outcomes of the consultation process would be published on the Council's website.

- Concern was raised regarding the loss of car parking provision in the area. The Panel was advised that the design proposals would seek to maximise the number of car parking spaces provided by the scheme. It was explained that details of the issues raised during the consultation process would be presented on the Council's website.
- Discussion took place regarding public rights of way and ownership of pavements, particularly those located outside of business premises. It was explained that the Council had a statutory duty to maintain the upkeep and maintenance of public rights of way.
- It was reported that the area of land take within the Langley Memorial Garden would be confirmed through the consultation process and discussion with the Council's Trustee Committee. Appendices A and B of the report set out the current options that had been taken to consultation. It was reported that in total 62 residents had attended consultation sessions, of those 16 had completed an online survey to indicate their preferred option; all respondents had selected Option A as their preferred scheme.
- It was asked what risk assessments had been undertaken in relation to the scheme. Members were advised that detailed road safety audits and traffic modelling had been carried out. It was agreed that these documents would be circulated to the Panel. It was explained that before the scheme was implemented a stringent road safety assessment, carried out by an independent auditor would be undertaken.

Speaking under Rule 30 Councillor Strutton raised concern that there had been a lack of engagement with local residents. He highlighted that the proposals would have a significant impact on the provision of car parking, and the availability of loading bays. He raised concerns relating to overdevelopment of the locality and detrimental impact on the 'village type' setting of the area. He said that a significant number of residents were dissatisfied with the proposed options and asked what outcomes the consultation process had produced.

The Network Management Engineer explained that the scheme was considered necessary due to the planned closure of Hollow Hill Lane by Network Rail, as part of their Western Rail Link to Heathrow. Extensive modelling had been conducted with the results indicating that the closure, if not supported by substantial mitigation, would result in high levels of congestion and potential gridlock in the area. It was considered that the proposed scheme would stimulate economic growth, enhance accessibility

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

and connectivity, reduce congestion and improve traffic flow in the area. The scheme was being designed to improve the highway infrastructure and transport links, and ultimately to make a positive impact and enhance the area.

The Chair thanked the Network Management Engineer and the Project Manager (Major Infrastructure Projects) for the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Network Management Engineer be requested to provide details of the road safety audits and traffic modelling relating to the Langley High Street scheme to the Panel.

19. Safer Public Spaces Update

The Interim Director of Place and Development provided an update on matters relating to safer public spaces.

The Chair invited comments and questions from the Panel.

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

- A Member suggested that free car parking should be introduced in Slough high street to encourage footfall and economic activity in the town centre. The Interim Director of Place and Development agreed to follow up this query outside of the meeting.
- It was asked if there had been an increase in the number of reported Covid cases occurring in Farnham Road, Chalvey or Slough high street. It was noted that there had been an uptick of cases in the Farnham Road area. It was explained that the clarity of data received from Public Health England needed to be improved to effectively track cases. To reduce the rate of transmission it continued to be important to promote social distancing, hand washing and the use of face coverings.

Resolved – That the Panel noted the report.

20. Food Poverty Task and Finish Group Report

The Policy Insight Analyst introduced a report that asked the Panel to review and agree the recommendations of the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group.

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

Members were provided with a PowerPoint presentation that set out the key findings of the Task and Finish Group.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair invited comments and questions from Members.

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

- Slough Food Bank recorded the number of parcels distributed, rather than the number of people approaching the service. Parcels were given out to people in crisis situations and each person was offered three parcels per crisis.
- It was asked if the Council provided any extra services to the most deprived wards in the Borough. It was explained that the Council did not currently provide any additional services to these wards; however it was hoped that following Cabinet's consideration of the Task and Finish Group recommendations, suitable Council support services would be put in place, rather than people being dependent on the provision of charity.

Speaking under Rule 30 Councillor Strutton highlighted that the wider societal issue arising from food poverty should be taken into account. He suggested that the Task and Finish Group's research and recommendations be used as a 'starting point' to inform the Council's approach to support vulnerable residents.

It was noted that the recommendations of the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group had the full support of the Residents Board.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Panel endorsed the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group report and recommendations, as attached as Appendix A of the report.
- (b) That Cabinet be recommended to formally recognise food poverty as a priority requiring immediate action, and commit to adopting the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group recommendations to reduce the levels of food poverty in the Borough.

21. NCS Scrutiny Panel 2020/21 Work Programme Report

Further to the discussion under Minute No. 16 it was agreed that an extraordinary meeting be scheduled during November to receive an update report on the Osborne Repairs Maintenance and Investment Contract.

It was noted that Councillor Ajaib wished to sit on the Rough Sleepers Task and Finish Group.

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel - 03.09.20

Resolved – That subject to an extraordinary meeting being scheduled during November, the Work Programme, as set out in Appendix A of the report be agreed.

22. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved – That the details of the Members' Attendance record be noted.

23. Date of Next Meeting - 22nd October 2020

Resolved – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 22nd October 2020.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.12 pm)