

PLANNING & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Kellaway (Chairman), Maureen Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Malcolm Beer, Gerry Clark and Leo Walters

Also in attendance: Cllr D Wilson

Officers: Russell O'Keefe, Maggie Nelson, Ashley Smith and Nabihah Hassan-Farooq

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Evans.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That minutes be approved subject to the amendments listed below.

To include the following amendments to minutes of the 18th October 2018 as follows;

ACTION- ROK to review wording around the action in relation to the affordable sites delivery figures and amend as necessary.

ACTION- That Ashley Smith advance the issues of planning items at the Windsor Development Management Panel.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Lisa Hughes, Member of the Local Access Forum asked the following question;

“Why does the Equal Opportunities Policy, within the Housing Allocation Policy, not include 7 of the 9 groups with Protected Characteristics in the Equality Act ? It excludes ; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sex and sexual orientation.”

Russell O'Keefe informed the Panel that the policy does comply with the Equality Act and that not all policies had been listed but that they had been considered. The question was welcomed and it was noted that the omitted protected characteristics would be explicitly listed in the policy. It was then asked when ethnic origin was recorded whether there were any exercises to record these groups from non-discrimination. Maggie Nelson, Interim Head of Housing Services informed the Panel that these details were acquired as part of the housing assessment and informed the housing policy.

Helen Price asked whether there was a consultation with the public with regards to the Homelessness Strategy and Housing Allocations Policy or whether there had been any further consultation with involved services, such as probation, ex armed forces?

It was noted that the Housing Allocations Policy and updated homeless strategy had been as a result of conversations with key groups. Several approaches had been looked at and that all relevant Overview & Scrutiny panels would be considering this item. The policy would be sent

to these organisations and consulted groups after the final draft had been considered by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panels.

It was then asked why residents had been excluded from the consultation? Russell O'Keefe, Acting Managing Director stated that there was no legal prescription to hold a public consultation with regards to this policy and that key agencies and client groups had been consulted with. There had been a wide reaching engagement with involved groups and that this item would return to Cabinet later this month for consideration.

UPDATED HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Russell O'Keefe presented the above titled item. Members were informed that the policy and strategy had been informed by best practice and legislation. There had been a collaborative approach to homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough and that the homeless strategy had a clear focus on prevention and working creatively to resolve each applicant's individual cases. A multi-agency panel had been set up to look at individual cases of rough sleeping and this had been successful in bringing together all involved parties to alleviate concerns and provide support to the individual rough sleepers. There had been a focus on the improvement of temporary accommodation, despite the reduction in temporary accommodation available. Members were reminded that there was a drive to support individuals and families into suitable accommodation and a lot of work had been carried out to provide suitable temporary accommodation. There had been improved customer service for residents and there had been occasions where the temporary accommodation offer (pending assessment and cases where a duty to provide an offer of reasonable accommodation had been confirmed) that these were converted into permanent offers of accommodation. Members were informed that the Action Plan would be updated annual and was reflective of the main demands and priorities for the borough. The Action Plan set out what had been achieved and supported the Homelessness Strategy and Housing Allocations Policy.

Councillor Leo Walters asked how the borough was supporting people (as per 2.7 of the report). It was confirmed that a lot of work with frontline officers had been done in order to assess cases and prevent homelessness as early as possible with advice and access to support. Ways to support clients included sourcing private rental, mediation with landlords and finding sustainable accommodation (where applicants were not owed a housing duty). Maggie Nelson, Interim Head of Housing Services, informed the Panel that each client who was threatened with homelessness was given a housing plan and that there were options for assistance, such as the rent deposit (interest free) loan. Members were told that great work had been carried out where notice seeking possession had been given to applicants and that mediation with landlords had proved to be successful.

Members discussed the decreasing levels of rough sleeping in the borough and it was estimated that there were 11 rough sleepers across the borough (8 individuals known in Windsor, 3 individuals known in Maidenhead). Members were advised that there had been 532 approaches to the Housing Service (year to date) and that there had been differing levels of complexity with each individual case. Maggie Nelson highlighted that there was a MEAM (make every adult matter) co-ordinator in post who supports individuals with complex needs, such as addictions and access to GP/services. John Westhouse also provided a venue for drop in services where Rough Sleepers could approach for advice and support and it was noted that this was a good place to sign post individuals to local services from. Multi agency meetings were held to help all involved and to work towards the individual's housing plan with great success. Members queried how rough sleepers spent their day and it was highlighted that temporary accommodation provided to these individuals throughout the SWEP(Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) period was available throughout the day.

As part of the good work outlined, Members were informed that the SWEP provision had been extended for a three month period. This piece of work was notably different to other authorities as it aimed to accommodate individuals for a long period of time in order to support them to finding sustainable accommodation. Members were informed that details of the SWEP

accommodation were being publicised through the Housing Team and MEAM co-ordinator. It was highlighted that a leaflet would be produced and distributed to all relevant and partnering organisations and services to promote the provision of accommodation throughout the SWEPP period. The SWEPP period will begin on the 22nd November and would continue until the 9th February. It was noted that there was no statutory provision to provide this accommodation but that the borough had taken the initiative to help support those most in need throughout the winter period. Members discussed the number of individuals who had been accommodated previously under the SWEPP provision and it was confirmed that 31 individuals had been accommodated last year. Members were in support of the extension to the SWEPP provision and wished to thank all officers involved, despite the difficulties with resources and monies available.

Councillor Beer stated that he admired the ambition of the strategy but did not feel that there was enough affordable housing being delivered to meet the ongoing housing needs of the borough. Members were told that there were currently 140 individuals in temporary accommodation and intensive work to reduce the period of stay in temporary accommodation was ongoing. It was highlighted that there was 1 individual in bed and breakfast accommodation and that all other accommodated individuals were in self-contained accommodation. Members were reminded that amidst the housing delivery offer that there would be sites with 100% affordable development on council owned lands and that there were emerging sites which offered good numbers of affordable housing. Examples of these sites included, York Road with a 38% affordable housing offer, with three further sites to follow. It was highlighted that the Maidenhead Golf Course development would also include a mix of 30-60% affordable housing and that RBWM was fortunate to have multiple council owned sites where properties could be built upon. The Panel were reminded that there were affordable housing challenges nationally and that the high values of land were a contributing factor for developers when deciding whether they could viably afford to deliver affordable homes. The panel were told that work with local housing associations, such as Radian and Housing Solutions meant that through nomination agreements that increased accommodation was available and that this had been driven through the recent changes to the Housing Act 2002 (as amended) and the Housing Regulation Act 2017. Priority was now assessed through a banding scheme, and in addition to the Localism Act 2011, that reasonable preference to priority groups could be given (such as ex-armed forces).

Members discussed out of area applicants and support available for these individuals/families. It was highlighted that there was a criteria for eligibility and that advice and assistance had been given to these individuals to support them in finding sustainable accommodation.

ACTION- That a glossary be added to the housing allocations policy to explain terminology such as “no wrong door” approach.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That the Panel noted the report.

(Councillor Beer abstained from the vote.)

CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL CONSTITUTION – PARTS 2C 29.4 AND PART 7F

Ashley Smith, Deputy Head of Planning outlined the above titled report. Members were informed that the conclusion of public speaking rights as previously agreed at O&S was being advanced to Full Council. The Panel were informed that the paper had returned to the overview & scrutiny panel and that the report included the recommendations from the planning and housing; task and finish group. One additional matter was included in the report relating to mandatory training for members and new members sitting on regulatory panels, this had originated from the Constitutional working gr

Members were informed that the training for new members had been scheduled and would be available to newly elected members after the election. Members discussed the report and commended the report and its recommendations. Councillor Clark commented that the

representations by members of the public and groups had been crystallised and was now very transparent. Members discussed the representation through Parish Councils and self-represented groups. Members felt that the change to the development management panels would reduce the length of meetings and give greater scope and consideration and discussion to individual applications. Cllr D Wilson noted that the right of panel chairs to extend speaking time in exceptional circumstances remained in the recommendation. Members felt that the appendix was not particularly clear and requested that the appendix be split in to two to show the changes between this proposed version and what had already been included in the May 2019 constitution.

ACTION- That the appendix be split in to two parts which separately identify and where amendments to the agreed May 2019 constitution have been made for the purposes of clarity.

Councillor Hunt stated that all panel reports should be provided (panel updates) should be provided directly to the case officer and agreed that very late 'on the day' submissions by applicants were to be avoided. Ashley Smith informed the panel that this was a way to enforce best practice and that this would mitigate any risk of confusion when late information was submitted. Information would be circulated ahead of the panel meeting and would be circulated to all panel members. Very late submissions would only be at the discretion of the Head of Planning. Councillor Beer stated that Parish Councils should be given three minutes to speak and it was highlighted that Parish Councils have the ability to make comments in finer detail ahead of the meeting which were published as part of the planning application. Councillor Hunt highlighted that parish councillors were able to extend their speaking rights through use of the chairman and his discretion.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That the report be agreed and noted.

WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That the work programme and its contents be noted.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 4th December 2018 at 6pm, May Room, Town Hall, Maidenhead

The meeting, which began at 5.34 pm, finished at 6.41 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....