

COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 13 APRIL 2021

PRESENT: Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Greg Jones (Vice-Chairman), Gurpreet Bhangra, Helen Price, Del Campo and Lenton

Also in attendance: Councillor Clive Baskerville, Councillor Donna Stimson, Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Christine Bateson, Councillor Andrew Johnson, Councillor Sayonara Luxton and Councillor Shamsul Shelim

Officers: Shilpa Manek, David Scott, Andrew Durrant, Anthony Hurst, Steph James, Chris Joyce and Andy Carswell

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

A one minute's silence was held at the start of the meeting in memory of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked those present to introduce themselves.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meetings held on February 15th and March 8th be approved as an accurate record.

Arising from the actions of the minutes, Cllr Del Campo noted the EQIA information from SERCO, which had been circulated to members, did not include information relating to women who were pregnant or on maternity leave. Cllr Bhangra said he would raise this with SERCO. Cllr Price asked about an update on the provision of bins in town centres. Shilpa Manek said this was being worked on by Simon Dale and a response may take some time, but an update would be circulated to members via email. It was confirmed that dog waste could be disposed of in an ordinary rubbish bin.

ACTION: Councillor Bhangra to raise Councillor Del Campo's concern with SERCO

ACTION: Update from Simon Dale to be circulated to Panel

MAIDENHEAD HERITAGE CENTRE - ANNUAL UPDATE

Due to connectivity issues Richard Poad, Chairman of the Maidenhead Heritage Centre, was unable to join the meeting and provide the update. It was agreed to defer the item to the next meeting.

Cllr Del Campo said she was concerned no new premises had been found for the Heritage Centre, following the approval of the York Road redevelopment plans in January 2018 when a new purpose-built facility had been proposed. She noted that a budget of £1.7million had been proposed. Cllr Del Campo asked if the members involved in making the decision had been misled; what had happened to the proposed budget; and what the Council would do now to help the Heritage Centre.

ACTION: Clerk to reschedule Maidenhead Heritage Centre update to the next meeting

UPDATE ON ALLOTMENTS

Anthony Hurst, Parks and Countryside Manager, introduced the item and said he wanted to highlight a few key points for members' attention. He said all allotment sites had remained open during the Covid pandemic, including during lockdown. Borough staff had worked to maintain allotment sites and the website had been updated to advise holders on to manage them more effectively. The Panel was told waiting lists for the eight allotment sites in Maidenhead had significantly increased over the last two years. Anthony Hurst said there were currently 494 people on the waiting list, compared to 148 people in 2019, and it could be between three and seven years before places became available depending on the allotment. Attempts had been made to make more plots available by subdividing existing plots, and of the 510 allotments there were now only 60 that were the original full size of 250 square metres. Allotments in Windsor were managed differently, and waiting lists were minimal.

Cllr Del Campo asked if the idea of community gardens had been considered, as this would allow residents the opportunity to grow items without needing their own individual plot. She said this would be beneficial on green belt sites that were due to be redeveloped, and would help with the Council's climate change goals. Cllr Price said landowners could be approached to ask if they would be willing to rent out areas of land or fields as private allotments to alleviate waiting lists, although she accepted this would be more expensive than renting an allotment through the Council. Anthony Hurst said these were both options that could be explored. Responding to a question from the Chairman, Anthony Hurst said discussions were already taking place regarding the possibility of using verges to cultivate plants. Cllr Price said she had heard only a limited number of these were being looked at. Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth, said a limited number of trials were taking place to ascertain how this would work and what resources were required. Once there was a better understanding of how this could work, there was a possibility the scheme could be rolled out further.

Members asked how allotments were managed in terms of how a plot may be taken off a holder if it was not being used. Anthony Hurst said plots were monitored and managers were able to tell from one month to the next if a plot was not being cultivated. If this was the case then the holder would be written to. Anthony Hurst explained that sometimes there were mitigating circumstances, such as the plot holder being ill or, in the case of Covid, having to shield or self isolate. If a plot were to be given up then work would take place to return it to a suitable condition. The process of retrieving and re-allocating a plot could take up to two to three months, depending on whether the holder responded to any correspondence from the Council, the time of year, and/or how neglected the plot was. Notice to quit letters to plot holders gave a four week notice period.

COVID UPDATE

David Scott, Head of Communities, gave an update on the most recent Covid figures for the Borough. There were four new cases reported on April 13, making a total of 8,400. In the week up until April 8 the infection rate was 27.1 per 100,000 people, compared to 41.6 people per 100,000 in the previous week. The Royal Borough was broadly in line with the averages for the South East and England as a whole, whereas Slough and some of the west London boroughs had higher than average rates. Infection rates among younger age groups had risen but were now starting to decrease. Hospital admission rates and the number of patients who

were hospitalised due to Covid were both falling. For the week March 26 to April 1, ten wards in the Royal Borough had reported no new cases.

The Panel was told two main lateral flow test centres had been set up in the Royal Borough, and a community collect arrangement had been introduced, based out of the car park at Ascot racecourse.

Better analysis of vaccination take-up rates was now being provided. It was apparent there were inequalities in vaccination rates within ethnic minorities and areas with higher levels of deprivation. However when applying for a lateral flow test, residents had the option of 'prefer not to say' when asked for their ethnicity. David Scott said node drawing was taking place to see if there was any link to cases outside the Borough, compared to those within it.

The Chairman said some residents had asked if they should still get lateral flow tests even after having one or both vaccinations. David Scott said the vaccination did not guarantee a person would not get infected, even if they were asymptomatic. As many people as possible were being encouraged to get the lateral flow kits, regardless of whether or not they had already been vaccinated.

The Chairman asked if any mapping was scheduled to take place following the influx of people from all parts of the country coming to Windsor to pay their respects following the death of Prince Phillip. David Scott said the scope of contact tracing was being explored, and the message of encouraging people not to travel to royal residences and the fact there were other ways for people to pay their respects was being communicated out.

David Scott reiterated that household transmission was still the most common way of the virus being spread. Young children were viewed as being the least vulnerable in terms of infection, but an increase in rates had been noted due to them being more likely to mix and not be able to maintain social distancing. Work was continuing with schools to ensure the continuation of good practice to limit the spread of the virus. Cllr Del Campo said she was concerned the number of infections among primary school children was higher than reported due to them generally being asymptomatic and not being tested, but they would then spread the disease to other people. David Scott said use of the community collect scheme was being encouraged for this reason.

Responding to a question from Cllr Bhangra, David Scott said there had been a reversal in inequality in terms of infection and vaccination rates among ethnic minority groups. There had been a lot of comms work taking place to stop misinformation. Communications were being sent out to spread the message that people observing Ramadan would not be considered to be breaking their fast if they received a vaccination, as it was not delivered intravenously.

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

Shilpa Manek, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the item and said Panel members had worked together on producing the final draft report. Cllr Price noted the previous year's Annual Report and highlighted it had said the Budget should be considered in isolation in its own meeting, and this had not taken place. She also pointed out that members had said they wanted to have more than four meetings per year. Shilpa Manek said the Panel had met every month in the past year, with the exception of August.

Cllr Price said it would assist the Panel in scrutinising topics if reports were more detailed and linked to the Council's strategic priorities, and these should be sent out to external speakers and report authors. She said this would help to improve the working of the Council. Cllr Price said circulating information to outside organisations had been a problem in the last year. The Chairman said it had not always been possible to meet with officers in a timely manner due to the nature of the Covid restrictions, but everyone had done their best to do things in a timely manner. He said the Panel should focus on what had been achieved over the past year. Shilpa Manek asked Cllr Price if her concerns regarding strategic priorities could be sent to

her in writing so she could take it up elsewhere, and ask if this was a view expressed by the chairmen of the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

ACTION: Clerk to investigate

Cllr Price said she did not agree with the wording in Point 2 of the Annual Report. Shilpa Manek said this was written by the Chairman and it expressed his point of view and not necessarily that of the Panel. Cllrs Price and Del Campo said they were both happy with the content of the Annual Report with the exception of Point 2, and asked for their views to be recorded.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Annual Report be approved and go forward to Full Council.

WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021-2022 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Shilpa Manek, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the item and invited comments from Members. Cllr Price said there should be an item on the Community Safety Partnership, as it was mentioned in the Constitution that one of the Panel's roles was to hold this to account and she said she did not believe this was happening. Cllr Price also asked for an update on the waste management strategy. Shilpa Manek confirmed this would come to a future meeting. Cllr Price queried the item on Alexandra Gardens car park, stating that she did not think there was an update. Shilpa Manek said that at the time the item was last on the agenda there was no update but there was now, and this would be brought to the meeting on June 15. It was agreed the deferred item on the Maidenhead Heritage Centre would also go to the June meeting. Cllr Del Campo said the agenda for June looked very busy and asked if it would be feasible for all the items to be covered adequately. It was agreed a possible date for an additional meeting in May would be investigated.

ACTION: Clerk to add Community Safety Partnership and Waste Management Strategy to Work programme

ACTION: Clerk to find additional meeting date for May 2021

Parish Cllr Margaret Lenton asked about the feasibility of planting bulbs on verges, and whether permission needed to be sought from the Royal Borough. The Chairman said he would speak to Anthony Hurst about this to clarify the situation. Cllr Price said the budget for bulbs would have to be provided by the parish councils. David Scott, Head of Communities, said this had appealed to a number of parish councils as the bulbs did not require watering or maintenance once they had been planted.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 7.35 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....