

PLANNING & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2017

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

Officers: Russell O'Keefe, Jenifer Jackson and Shilpa Manek

ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman nominated Councillor Hunt and this was seconded by Councillor Clark.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No Apologies for absence were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were Agreed to be a true and correct record.

Councillors Lilly Evans and Maureen Hunt abstained from voting as they were not present at the meeting.

The Chairman announced that Item 8 – Local Housing Crisis had been withdrawn for further work.

2018/19 BUDGET

Russell O'Keefe, Executive Director, informed the Panel that the entire 2018/18 Budget report went to Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel. Each of the other overview and scrutiny panels would only get the part of the report that was relevant to that overview and scrutiny panel. At this panel, the focus was Planning.

The report had a cover page explaining the appendices, Appendix B showed the income from planning, appendix C showed the fees and charges for planning and Appendix D showed the capital bids.

Other points raised included:

- There were no housing figures, these were missing totally from the tables.
- How many staff will planning have once all vacancies filled ? By the end of January, Planning would have a full team with 57 FTE in the service.
- How many officers programmed to carry out the appraisal report at Holyport. There would be 3 rather than 2.
- Old Windsor has a conservation area that has been on the books for 20-30 years. Current issues are resolved under the general principles. There are eight areas in the borough that do not have appraisal reports, of which, Old Windsor, is one.

- There is a shortfall in the Neighbourhood Planning, gone from £25K to £20K. The council still have access to funds by seeking a grant from the CLG. A Referendum costs more than the grant covers and the council has to cover the difference.
- The transformation budget covers seven areas of service, mainly IT for moving the performance on. This would support customer services with better information, it would enable faster planning application processing. The aim was to be with the better performing councils.

ACTION: Russel O’Keefe to check about the housing figures and circulate them to the Panel.

- Would the property company be included in this report? It was not currently included. The property company information was available to Members anytime.
- Very few applicant have pre application advice, is it the cost deterring applicants? The Panel discussed that it was a small price to pay but applicants were not aware of this service. Residents needed to be made aware along with the positive effects.

ACTION: Planning to advertise the pre application service and its advantages in the ‘Around the Royal Borough’.

- Why was the tree service complaints so costly?

ACTION: Russel O’Keefe to look into the tree service costs and report back to the Panel.

The report was noted by the Panel.

SPEED OF PROCESSING PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Jenifer Jackson, Head of Planning, took the Panel through the report. Jenifer Jackson informed the Panel that a typical household application would take eight weeks, a major, ten units or more would take thirteen weeks and anything larger would take sixteen weeks. The Chairman asked about what happens to the applications that are not completed. Jenifer Jackson informed the Panel that some remain with planning for many reasons, sometimes as planning are negotiating with the applicant. Residents often use the council as a planning consultant.

Russell O’Keefe informed the Panel that there were two simple levels, offer a planning service or a development control service and some councils could be very rigid in their decision making. RBWM use best practice wherever possible to negotiate and get the best outcome. Our officers spend a lot of time with the residents.

The Panel raised the following points:

- What were the sanctions for under-developing? We would be monitored on a two year rolling period. The government would intervene by looking at the planning handling service or by sending applications direct to the Planning Inspectorate.
- An issue seems to be that the applicant does not listen to the planning advice.
- The referenced Act in the report is out of date.
- Of the appeals allowed, how many were against the officer’s recommendation? There was a large difference between the planning officer and the Panel but this year, it is very different.
- Where did the 20% come from?
- Why are the appeals so high? Since we still do not have a new plan adopted, we are still using the very old local plans from 1999. we would be more vulnerable to lose appeals. Once the new local plan was adopted, we would have a stronger position.

- How many local authorities have a new local plan? Those authorities that have a post 2004 local plan are having intervention now.
- The Local Plan would be submitted on 31 January 2018.
- Timing of a pre application meeting? Once again this would depend on the type of application. A household application would take four-six weeks and on major applications, we offer a bespoke service.
- The high turnover of staff and agency staff, not knowing the borough and therefore giving incorrect advice. By the end of January 2018, there would be a full team of staff.
- It would be better to have figures in tables rather than percentages to show the true situation.
- Was it possible to increase appeal costs or apply a cooling off period between applications? We cannot levy charges and can only apply the cooling off period on certain circumstances.
- Could we compare ourselves with other local authorities. All local authorities can be found on the government website.
- Resource would need to be considered as some local authorities are heavily resourced and others are short staffed. So the comparison would be meaningless.

The Panel thanked the planning department for all their hard work, even without a full team. The Panel recommended that a summary of the report to be sent to Parish Councils.

ACTION: Jenifer Jackson to send a summary of this report to all Parish Councils.

ACTION: An item to be placed in Around the Royal Borough, consult with Chairman.

ACTION: Place this item on the Agenda for every other meeting, including performance data on pre application.

CIL AND CIL GOVERNANCE

Jenifer Jackson, Head of Planning, informed the Panel that the CIL Governance document had not been produced yet but would come to the Panel when completed. The Chairman requested information on the differences between S106 and CIL. Jenifer Jackson informed the Panel that all S106 income and expenditure from 2008 till now were published.

ACTION: Circulate this published information to the Panel.

Currently we were still in transition phase for S106 to phase-out and CIL coming in. There was a total of three years to implement. However, S106 would still be used. In the Neighbourhood plan, for community priorities and council priorities, a combination of CIL and S106 would be used.

The Chairman asked for a briefing note on this to be sent to Panel Members.

ACTION: Jenifer Jackson to produce and circulate briefing note to Panel.

ACTION: Add this item to next meeting Agenda.

LOCAL HOUSING CRISIS

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the following future meeting date:

Thursday 1 February 2018 to begin at 6.30pm

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....