

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 5 February 2024

Present: Councillors Siân Martin (Chair), George Blundell (Vice-Chair), Clive Baskerville, Alison Carpenter, Jodie Grove, Gurch Singh, Jack Douglas and Leo Walters

Present virtually: Councillor Asghar Majeed

Also in attendance: Councillor Adam Bermange

Officers: Mark Beeley, Andrew Durrant and Ian Manktelow

Officers in attendance virtually: Amanda Gregory and Paul Beetham

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor K Singh, Councillor Douglas was attending the meeting as a substitute.

Councillor Majeed was attending the meeting virtually.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Thames Valley Police Annual Presentation

Jason Hogg, Chief Constable at Thames Valley Police, and Clare Knibbs, Superintendent at Thames Valley Police, provided the Panel with a presentation on the work undertaken by the police over the past year. Thames Valley Police was the largest non-metropolitan force in England and Wales, covered three counties and had a total population of 2.5 million. The force was made up of 4,970 officers, 3,571 staff and 261 police community support officers. Data was shared for the Windsor and Maidenhead Local Policing Area:

- 1,284 incidents of crime.
- 1,302 cases of domestic abuse.
- 275 cases of burglary.
- 743 cases of violence with injury.
- 24 incidents involving knife crime.
- 261 sexual offences.

Actions and outcomes were shared from retail theft in the town centre, theft from vehicles, and rural crime.

Councillor Grove felt that there was more focus on tackling retail crime, she asked how the police would ensure that progress was not lost in tackling violence against women and girls.

Jason Hogg said that there had been an increase in neighbourhood officers to tackle both areas and resources could be allocated as and when required. Each offence of shoplifting did not need to be investigated, it was repeat offenders which needed to be apprehended.

Councillor Baskerville considered retention of police officers in the Thames Valley, particularly given the proximity of the Metropolitan Police in London who could offer higher salaries.

Jason Hogg said that there had been a focus on attraction rather than what the life of a police officer was really like. In November, the bar had been raised and extra checks had been brought in to make sure that new officers joining the force understood what the job was. There were not many officers lost to the Metropolitan Police but the higher London weighting on salaries was an issue and there were also a number of officers who moved to the private sector. Jason Hogg wanted to ensure that Thames Valley Police was a great organisation to work for and that all staff felt valued.

Councillor Walters asked for confirmation on the number of burglaries which took place across the Windsor and Maidenhead area.

Clare Knibbs confirmed that there had been a 9% reduction in burglary compared to the previous year.

Jason Hogg added that there had been a significant reduction in home burglaries since Covid and this had not gone back to its previous level.

Councillor G Singh commented that it was disappointing the Police and Crime Commissioner was unable to attend the meeting but thanked the officers present for their work and presentation. He felt that the good figures shared was different to reality and that there was a lack of frontline police on the streets. Councillor Singh suggested that there was a priority on Windsor and more support needed to be given to Maidenhead, particularly in relation to the night time economy.

Jason Hogg explained that due to the learning and training required for some officers, neighbourhood teams could be stretched and may not be seen by communities and residents for certain periods of time. He encouraged Councillors to report issues or areas of improvement to the team so that they could explore what could be done to be more proactive.

Clare Knibbs said that Windsor was a full operation for the night time economy as there were night clubs, there was not the same level of demand in Maidenhead.

Councillor G Singh said that he was comparing Maidenhead to twenty years ago, when there was a significant number more police on the streets. He asked if the high skilled resource hubs to tackle the more specialist crimes were still based in the local area or whether it was now regionally based.

Jason Hogg confirmed that in Windsor and Maidenhead there were dedicated officers for sex offenders, child abuse and detectives. The regional teams were the Serious Organised Crime Unit and Counterterrorism teams. There were plans to increase the capacity of the holding cells in Maidenhead and this would mean an increase in the number of detectives in the town.

Councillor Douglas noted a piece of legislation making its way through Parliament which would allow the police to address homeless activity where it was causing damage, disturbance

or distress. He asked if there would be any changes to policing in this area should the legislation become law and would the policy apply at a national or local police level.

Clare Knibbs explained that the police were involved in the drafting of a Homeless Strategy and an increase in powers in this area was welcomed. The strategy needed to be a joint partnership approach with other relevant agencies and organisations.

Jason Hogg said that the police could not solve the issue of homelessness on their own. The arrest powers were something that could be used if they were required.

Councillor Carpenter highlighted the issue of pavement parking outside of schools in Dedworth which had been problematic for local residents.

Jason Hogg said that the powers available to the police depended on the type of road. Tickets could be issued but this was a short term solutions, increasing the amount of parking could be explored by the Highways authority, for example.

Clare Knibbs confirmed that pavement parking was on the patrol plans for the neighbourhood teams and could be picked up as part of PCSOs engagement with local schools.

Councillor Blundell asked how policing of e-scooters had been so far.

Clare Knibbs said that enforcement had been targeted with the first thing being engagement and discussion to raise awareness. For repeat offenders, tickets could be issued.

Jason Hogg continued that the legislation around e-scooters was clear; helmets, a driving licence and insurance was required. The police also had the power to confiscate e-scooters. Any hotspots could be passed on and targeted appropriately.

Councillor Majeed noted that there was a big difference between check 25 and check 18, with check 25 having an approximately 50% failure rate.

Clare Knibbs was unsure of why there was a significant difference. Once a failure occurred training, education and awareness took place with the premises.

Councillor Majeed asked if there was anything that the council could do to help with the retention rates of officers in Thames Valley Police.

Jason Hogg suggested that the police did a lot of good things and this positive news would be great to promote, along with things like open days.

Councillor Majeed questioned what the policy was for cases of mental health.

Jason Hogg confirmed that it depended on the situation, if a crime was being committed or there was an imminent risk to life it was a police matter. For other mental health cases, the ambulance service would be the first to respond.

Councillor Baskerville asked who the mini-police were.

Clare Knibbs explained that neighbourhood PCSOs went into schools and ran mini-police sessions with primary school aged children.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place, thanked Jason and Clare for attending the Panel meeting. The council were working closely with the police, for example on homelessness sleeping in multi-story car parks. The Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy was something which would be brought forward in future for adoption and could be reviewed by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Jason Hogg concluded that it was vital local communities and residents felt safe. If there were issues that were a concern, Jason Hogg appealed to Councillors and residents to let the police know.

Draft Affordable Housing Delivery Supplementary Planning Document

Ian Manktelow, Principal Planning Policy Officer, gave the Panel a brief presentation setting out the context behind the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). There had been a commitment in the Borough Local Plan to prepare an SPD and this would provide an opportunity to give more guidance to developers. The SPD would also allow the council to secure affordable housing that best met the needs of the borough. The report would be going to Cabinet on 20th February for approval before going out to consultation for a minimum of four weeks in March or April. Consultation responses would then be reviewed and the SPD would be updated accordingly. The SPD could be brought back to Cabinet in July, dependant on the extent of the consultation responses and the issues raised.

Councillor Carpenter asked if the SPD would ensure that the council saw the maximum allocation of affordable housing being offered. It was stated in the report that those from minority ethnic backgrounds would struggle to gain housing in the borough but this was not what Councillor Carpenter had experienced in her conversations with residents. She asked what a designated rural area was and why this was important along with the significance of unparished areas. Councillor Carpenter considered the options available to developers and that an alternative site could be used, she questioned how the council could ensure that this was similar in quality to the original designs. For developers who chose the financial contribution, Councillor Carpenter queried what happened to this money and how would the council make sure that this was used to build further affordable housing.

Ian Manktelow said that the document would put the council in a better position when it came to viability discussions with developers. However, there could be site specific reasons why the target level of affordable housing could not be achieved. There was a review mechanism in place, for example if a planning application was approved in year 1 but the development did not start until year 3, the decision could be reviewed for more affordable housing due to a change in market demands. The comment on ethnic minority figures was a general comment picked up by the Housing team and Ian Manktelow would check this after the meeting. On rural areas, there were some parishes in south east England which were formally set out in legislation as rural areas. This legislation allowed the council to set a lower site size threshold at which the council could secure affordable housing. Unparished areas did not qualify as they were not parishes under the legislation. In relation to offsite provision, the priority was to get an appropriate level of affordable housing on the proposed site. If there were two sites coming through from the same developer, they could in theory allocate all of their affordable housing on one of the two sites but this was not the preferred approach. Where financial contributions were received from developers, this was ringfenced and could only be spent on affordable housing.

ACTION – Ian Manktelow to check the comment on minority ethnic groups which had been included as part of the Equality Impact Assessment.

Councillor Bermange, Cabinet Member for Planning, Legal and Asset Management, felt that the SPD helped to empower the decision makers to ensure that viability was not abused. He commented that the Borough Local Plan had been agreed in 2022 and had been finalised using viability analysis at the time, developers needed to justify any change in circumstances which meant that affordable housing was deemed unviable.

Councillor G Singh commented that it was pleasing to see the draft report considered by the Panel. He felt that the SPD closed a loophole particularly as there was not enough affordable housing being delivered. The report was very technical and he suggested that a foreword could be added to the front of the report to outline what the SPD was. It was clear to see the

preference for affordable housing to be on site but there were other options available which could be used if needed. Councillor G Singh was concerned about planning applications not being validated without a statement. He suggested that reasonable time was given for the statement to be validated so that planning applications were not needlessly rejected.

Ian Manktelow explained that planning officers needed all of the information up front to make a decision on applications. Once an application had been validated, the length of time for a decision to be made started and chasing key documents could affect the performance of the planning team. A developers' guide had been included at the start of the SPD as a summary of the guidance but officers could consider the best way to publicise the consultation once it went live.

Councillor G Singh responded that a key audience of the SPD were people on the housing list, as they would want to know what the council were doing to help them get on the property ladder.

Councillor Walters said that there was a need for more affordable housing and he was pleased to see an emphasis on two bedroom houses instead of flats. He asked what a rural area was in the context of the SPD.

Ian Manktelow highlighted that the SPD was based on Borough Local Plan policy. Normally, the council could only require affordable housing on sites of 10 or more homes. Within the designated rural areas, this threshold was reduced to 5 homes and the council could require 40% of the homes to be affordable.

Councillor Grove highlighted concern that affordable housing could be built on a separate site and whether there were any conditions on developers to ensure that this was completed in a certain timeframe. There could also be areas with very little affordable housing because of developers claiming that they were not viable.

Ian Manktelow said that there would probably be very few examples of affordable housing being located on a separate site as this would require two planning applications to come through from the same developer at the same time. He noted that the S106 money would have a clause which would state when the money would need to be spent and if not spent within that period it would have to be paid back, so there was a need for some flexibility in the agreement. There would be an ambition for it to be spent relatively close to where it had been collected.

Councillor Grove asked if there were clear guidelines on whether developers should provide affordable housing on site, at an alternative site, or provide a financial contribution.

Ian Manktelow explained that the onus was on the developer and there were not strict requirements implemented by the council. This was designed to ensure that there was pressure on the developer to focus on the onsite affordable housing option.

Councillor Baskerville asked what the target was for affordable housing and how much had been delivered in recent years. He suggested that there was a feeling that the council had accepted viability arguments in the past and questioned whether the SPD would give the council more clout against developers.

Ian Manktelow shared data with the Panel showing the total number of affordable housing units completed over the past ten years. This was compared with the total number of homes created each year. The council wanted to see less shared ownership and more social and affordable rented homes.

Councillor Baskerville felt that some developers had been tough on the council in allowing it to reach intended targets. He queried how difficult it was for developers to provide an appropriate level of affordable housing.

Ian Manktelow confirmed that if a viability case was received from a developer, the council requested that the financial viability appraisal of the scheme was submitted. This was considered by an expert valuer to assess the appraisal to make a decision.

Andrew Durrant raised a couple of examples where developers had been challenged by the council and more affordable housing had been included in the plans.

Councillor Grove asked that if applications were rejected and the developers went to an appeal, how well supported would the council be by the SPD.

Ian Manktelow said that it was a balance and all aspects of the scheme needed to be considered. There were likely to be positives to the scheme, including the delivery of housing, that needed to be balanced against the negative elements. He reminded the Panel that the balance was 'tilted' in favour of development where there was not a five year housing land supply, as was currently the case.

Councillor G Singh proposed a recommendation from the Panel, that a foreword or executive summary was included at the start of the SPD. This was seconded by Councillor Baskerville.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: The Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommended to Cabinet:

- i) That a foreword or executive summary was included at the start of the Affordable Housing SPD.**

Appointment of co-optees to Overview and Scrutiny

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, said that the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel were able to appoint two Parish Councillors as co-optees on the Panel. After contacting all Parish Councils, three nominations had been received. Two of these nominations had been received before the deadline, while the nomination received after the deadline was recommended to be a substitute co-optee. The Panel were asked to approve the report before it went to Full Council for formal ratification.

Councillor G Singh asked if any further information could be given on the proposed co-opted representatives.

Mark Beeley confirmed that he could share the nomination statements with the Panel after the meeting.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to share nomination statements from the three proposed co-optees after the meeting with the Panel.

Councillor Majeed noted that for the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, there were representatives for the Church of England the Roman Catholic dioceses. He asked if other religions could also be included.

Mark Beeley explained that these were the positions set out in the RBWM Constitution, to appoint co-optees from other religions would require a change to the constitution.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and recommended to Full Council that:

- i) The appointment of the following representatives were made to the Panel until May 2027:**

- a. Louvaine Kneen as the Parish Councillor representing the Northern Parishes.**
- b. Roly Latif and David Saunders (sub) as the Parish Councillors representing the Southern Parishes.**

Work Programme

Mark Beeley highlighted the CIL/S106 scoping document which was for approval by the Panel in advance of an item being added to the work programme.

Councillor Carpenter said that she had submitted a scoping document on the Tivoli contract.

Mark Beeley confirmed that this was being discussed with officers, there was a plan to have a review of Tivoli performance in the spring in advance of the summer period. The Panel could then consider what actions Tivoli had put in place to ensure that some of the problems which had been seen last summer would not be repeated.

Councillor G Singh felt that the council had lost a lot of money on S106 over the years and this was an important area to bring to scrutiny.

Councillor Blundell put forward a scoping document on a selective licensing scheme.

Andrew Durrant said that it was an area that had been discussed in the team.

Councillor G Singh felt it was a good proposal and a scheme could bring in a significant amount of extra funding.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....