

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 8 November 2017

Time: 7.01 - 8.27 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Gaffney (in the Chair)

Councillors Miss S Brown, A D Collingwood, C Etholen, A E Hill, R Newman,
Ms C J Oliver, R Raja, J A Savage, C Whitehead and R Wilson, M Hanif

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: K Ahmed, M C Appleyard, H Bull,
Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M E Knight and Mrs W J Mallen

Also present: Councillor Mrs Langley

18. MINUTE'S SILENCE

A one minute's silence was observed to pay respects to ex-councillor David Morris who had sadly passed away recently.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement and Review Commission held on 13 September 2017 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

21. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed all Members to the Commission meeting, particularly Councillor Mrs Langley, Cabinet Member for Housing and Brian Daly, WDC Housing Services Manager.

22. VERBAL UPDATE ON HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND SAUNDERTON LODGE

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Councillor Mrs Langley, Cabinet Member for Housing, updated the Commission on the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and explained that due to the lack of response from central government, in respect of the HMO Licensing Scheme, and despite keeping in constant contact with them, a decision had been taken to give

government until the end of the year to respond, after which time, if no response was forthcoming, a pilot would be set up although there was a cost implication involved. It was noted that officers had already begun a desktop exercise. Councillor Mrs Langley explained that a decision would not be taken before the end of the year, just in case government did respond before the year was up with different recommendations, as it would therefore mean that amendments would have to be undertaken. So rather than risk this scenario, hence the delay in making a decision locally.

Brian Daly, WDC Housing Services Manager, explained the desktop exercise currently being undertaken was concentrating on one ward only and that two hundred and eighty potential HMO's had been identified that was a large number of HMO's that needed licensing. The Commission was informed that five people from three different households meant the HMO was licensable. If a property was over two storey's high it was not licensable although under the new scheme this was likely to change.

Brian Daly agreed to circulate statistics on what conditions were like and whether there were any HMO's in the district that needed enforcement to ensure reasonable space in an HMO.

The Commission suggested that when running a pilot, physical habitable spaces for individuals and families needed a clear policy. If a licence for three people and above could be issued, then perhaps a contribution or financial settlement from landlords could be requested towards the community for any disruption.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing for the update and noted that if government had not responded before the year of the year, that a further update would be given to the Commission in January 2018 on how they intended to move forward.

Saunderton Lodge

Councillor Mrs Langley, Cabinet Member for Housing, updated the Commission on Saunderton Lodge and reported that a light refurbishment was an option considered, but due to the building's age, it was suffering. It became evident that spiralling costs of refurbishment meant that officers needed to put together a 'Plan B', namely a modular build for those in need of accommodation. The number of units could not increase as Bucks County Council would not support any increase. Whilst the idea was innovative, it was not without its risks. The report was being put before Cabinet the week following this meeting. 'Plan B' would be subject to planning permission which would be made clear to Cabinet when this was presented to them.

Brian Daly explained there were two options available, either refurbishment or the modular build. The refurbishment would not increase the size or numbers whereas the modular build would ensure larger accommodation for more people.

23. CORPORATE PLAN (2015-19)

Catherine Whitehead, Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services, explained that Cabinet Members had raised some concern in relation to some of the terminology contained within the Corporate Plan report and therefore it was being redrafted. It was noted that the report had been removed from the Cabinet Forward Plan for November and would go forward at a later date. Catherine Whitehead reported that she would bring the report to Improvement and Review Commission in January with a more substantial document which will then go forward to Cabinet in February and ultimately to Council.

24. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Catherine Whitehead explained that the report, like the Corporate Plan report would also be brought to the Commission in January. This would then go forward to Cabinet in February and ultimately to Council.

25. DIGITAL FIRST STRATEGY

Catherine Whitehead explained that the report, like the previous two reports would also be brought to the Commission in January. This would then go forward to Cabinet in February and ultimately to Council.

26. COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME & CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Commission considered the Commission Work Programme reported along with the Cabinet Forward Plan.

The Chairman commented that the Remaking of the River Wye was more complicated than previously thought and therefore more time would be required to complete this work. A site visit to Sheffield and Stroud was being organised for Task and Finish Group members. Advice was being sought from a mechanical engineer so much work was being undertaken, behind the scenes. It would not therefore proceed to the current timetable.

The Commission noted that the Local Plan had now been completed.

Councillor Whitehead put forward a proposal for a new Task and Finish Group to scrutinise tackling anti-social behaviour and crime within High Wycombe town centre. He proposed involving Thames Valley Police to enable the Commission to put forward their recommendations to the police, based on their findings. After some discussion, it was agreed, in principle, to set up a new Task and Finish Group but instead of concentrating on the town centre, it would be a District-wide consultation. Catherine Whitehead explained that a Work Programme Suggestion Form would need to be completed before the Commission could formally agree to set this up.

27. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

There were no Councillors Calls for Action.

28. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS

There were no Supplementary Items.

29. URGENT ITEMS

There were no Urgent Items.

30. REPORT OF THE BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chairman explained that this item was in two parts and that the report being considered by the Commission this evening was Part 1 and that Part 2 would commence in January 2018.

The Commission noted the recommendations to be put before Cabinet and agreed that the wording in Recommendation 11 be amended.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Brian Daly	- Housing Services Manager
Liz Hornby	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Catherine Whitehead	- Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy.