

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 14th January, 2010.

Present:- Councillors Mann (Chair), Coad (Vice-Chair), Davis, A S Dhaliwal and Walsh

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Shine, Munkley and Parmar

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Cryer and Pabbi

PART 1

55. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

56. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 19 November, 2009

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 19 November, 2009, were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising -

In response to a query from the Chair, the Assistant Director, Transformational Change, advised that the report on 'L35/N18 – Pricing policy and Take up campaigns', due to be submitted to the current meeting, would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee on 4th February, 2010. This was to accommodate Officers' time commitments. Members requested that the Commissioner for Community and Leisure and a representative from Slough Community Leisure be invited to attend this meeting with regard to this item.

With reference to Minute 49, the Chair enquired as to whether Officers were aware of any further information in relation to the reduction of the Mayor's budget. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that a written response had been received from the Mayor's Office. The deletion of the permanent Mayor's driver post and the subsequent use of contract drivers as necessary had led to a significant saving of £8,100. This would be a long-term budget saving and would be carried forward to the following year.

A Member raised a query, with regard to minute 51, about the way in which grants were allocated / used. The Committee was advised that the Members Voluntary Panel dealt with grants made to small voluntary groups and that, in future, the minutes of the meetings of this panel, including the outcome of any grants awarded, would be circulated to all Members. Larger grants, such as area based grants, would form part of the budget building process and would be approved via Cabinet. Following this a Member enquired as to the number of ringfenced grants received. The Assistant Director reported that Settlement grants from central government formed part of the budget build;

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however others may arise throughout the year as a result of new policy initiatives. Should any grants be awarded to other bodies, this would occur via the Members Voluntary Panel. Currently, government policy was moving away from the ring-fencing of grants and subsequently, a large proportion of these would be rolled into area based grants. Members of the Committee emphasised the need to ensure that the process of grant allocation was transparent.

57. Performance and Financial Reporting for 2009/10

Performance and Financial Reporting for 2009/10 -

The Assistant Director, Transformational Change, presented a report to the Committee outlining the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management. The report focused on several key areas, including:

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- **Performance Indicator L27 (% of staff with appraisals in place)**

The Committee was informed that the percentage of completed staff appraisals had increased to 27.2% from 21.9 % in December, 2009. A Member emphasised the importance of staff appraisals in creating satisfied and productive staff and expressed concern that the Council was not on track to reach target. Following this, a Member queried who was responsible for conducting appraisals and was informed that Line Managers are required to carryout annual staff appraisals for each member of their teams. The Assistant Director, Transformational Change, outlined several proposed actions to improve performance, including; the implementation of a timetable to align with the service planning cycle, the introduction of new simplified forms accompanied by staff briefings, and the inclusion of an additional sign-off stage within the process to improve monitoring and compliance. The aim was to achieve a culture shift with regard to these processes within the Council. The Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment suggested that the number of appraisals completed was likely to be in excess of the figures reported as it was known that an issue existed with regard to managers failing to complete or send off the covering paper work. A review was currently examining the detailed cost and staff time required for early implementation of the Oracle Performance management module to support the appraisal process. A publicity and communications campaign to improve take up, would be considered once Oracle/ new forms are in place.

- **Proposed Change to Performance Monitoring in place for Overview and Scrutiny**

The Assistant Director, Transformational Change, detailed a proposed change to the current approach to performance monitoring, to be applied on a pilot basis, to allow the sub-panels to have a key role in scrutinising performance relating to their specific areas and to pass their feedback to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This alternate approach had been agreed upon at a recent meeting of the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels. A Member cautioned against the duplication of work between the Committee and panels and highlighted the need for the relevant Chairs to manage the discussions.

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- **Financial Reporting**

The Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment updated the Committee with regard to the Council's current financial position. The net revenue budget for 2009/10 was £102.6m; however, there was a projected overspend of £753k for this period. This figure had been managed down from the overspend projection of £850k reported at the previous meeting. £230k of savings, arising from the re-profiling of the capital programme and the review of earmarked reserves, had been made but had been offset by corresponding pressures arising from client placement budgets. A Member requested confirmation that the savings made within the Community and Wellbeing Directorate, as a result of the reduction of 300 hours during October with regard to Home Care, was natural wastage and not cutbacks in such an important service area. The Strategic Director Green and Built Environment advised that these were understood to be valid efficiency savings.

Several potential budgetary variances were identified in relation to a number of emerging issues/risks, including:

- There was no contingency within the Community and Wellbeing Directorate to cope with any possible surge in new placements that may occur in the coming winter months and the current strategy of '1 in 1 out' may not contain a change in demand.
- The volatility across client placements remained an area of concern for the Education and Children's Services Directorate and close scrutiny with preventative services being advocated where appropriate was required.
- Any further problems with the Energy from Waste (EfW) plant would impact on the budget for the Green and Built Environment Directorate by virtue of alternative disposal costs. In addition, there was currently a reduction in fee income with respect to planning applications due to the receipt of fewer applications.

Resolved: –

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That performance information be broken down according to directorate and presented to the relevant sub-panels on a pilot basis for the next performance reporting cycle to provide the sub-panels with the opportunity to consider performance and pass their feedback to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- (c) That an update on the progress achieved with regard to staff appraisals be presented to the Committee at its next meeting.

58. The Council's Grant Funding - Update on the Review and Information on Current Processes

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The Assistant Director, Transformational Change, presented a report to the Committee outlining the current grant making process and updating Members on the progress made with regard to the strategic review of grant funding and support arrangements in relation to the voluntary and community sector. An internal steering group, chaired by the Director of Improvement and Development, was currently leading the review and met on a monthly basis to monitor progress. Research into the arrangements of other local authorities had been carried out to identify examples of best practice and currently, a council-wide mapping exercise was underway to provide information on all grants and contracts provided by the council and related support and monitoring arrangements. In addition, an initial consultation had been held with the voluntary and community sector to gain their views on current systems as well as to identify training/support. The findings from the consultation would inform the future Funding Strategy.

Members raised several issues in the subsequent discussion, including: -

- A Member queried, with regard to the small grants fund process outlined in Appendix A, whether any funding was provided to projects operating outside of Slough. The Committee was informed that funding was not provided for such projects and that this was checked for within the assessment period.
- A Member enquired as to whether during the assessment period organisations were asked to provide evidence that they had held a bank account previously and was advised that within the existing process the Council only required that they currently had an account. This was to ensure that new organisations were not excluded from the process. However, it was recognised that this would provide a useful check where appropriate.
- A Member suggested that with regard to long term funding, a separate assessment process be applied and that a mechanism be embedded to allow feedback from users. The Officer advised that this was a good idea and would be examined further.
- A Member queried whether an equality of funding existed in relation to Slough's different communities, in the context of the results of the Slough Place Survey. The Committee was advised that information such as that provided by the Slough Place Survey would inform the decisions made by Members and Officers.

Resolved: - That the report be noted

59. Britwell & Haymill Regeneration - Land Appropriation Report

The Solicitor - Head of Property and Contracts presented a report to the Committee outlining the proposal to appropriate the land within Kennedy park from open space to planning purposes to facilitate the first phase of the Britwell and Haymill Regeneration project, in which existing commercial and housing units required re-siting. Included within the report were several

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representations from both members of the public and ward councillors. The Committee was advised that Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the 1972 Act") permitted a local authority to appropriate (transfer) its land from one statutory purpose to another where it concluded that the land was no longer required for the former purpose or where it would better meet an alternative purpose. However, where the land is currently used as open space a local authority could not appropriate it for another purpose until its intention had been publicised in a notice and any objections received to the proposed appropriation had been considered.

Ward Councillors for Britwell and for Haymill outlined several objections to the proposal including:

- That a pedestrian pathway through Kennedy Park to provide access to the re-sited shops for residents of the Northborough area would be unsafe and therefore not viable.
- That the consultation held with regard to the Britwell and Haymill regeneration project was flawed as many residents and the Ward Councillors for both the Britwell and Haymill areas were not contacted.
- That by re-siting the shops the Council was reducing the client base of the shops.
- That the land with which the Council intended to replace the open space, lost as a result of the proposal, was not fit for purpose.
- That Kennedy Park is used extensively by residents of all ages and particularly the area identified for appropriation. Further to this, residents would lose the benefit of a large area of open space if the Council replaced the open space elsewhere.
- That the commitment to replace the lost open space was an aspiration rather than a requirement of the project.

The Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal advised the Committee that within the detailed planning application the Council would have to evidence that they would be able to replace or improve the open space available to residents but that currently the planning application was at the outline stage. In addition, the Labour group had made a political commitment to replace the open space and that this would be met either in phase 2 of the regeneration project within the cleared central area of the Britwell Estate or by the use of land adjoining Kennedy Park, currently owned by Slough Estates. With regard to the consultation, the survey was carried out by an independent organisation, Beacon Research, and an exhibition held in the existing shops on the Britwell Estate. Over 1500 people were consulted, 1000 of those from the immediate areas of Britwell and Northborough and another 500 people from the wider area. Ward Councillors and residents from Haymill had not formed the focus of the consultation as the area would not be directly affected until phase 2 of the regeneration project.

In the subsequent discussion Members raised a number of issues, including:

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- A Member expressed particular concern regarding the loss of well used open space in an area of deprivation. Further to this, a Member noted that everyone was in favour of the regeneration project and addressing the issues associated with the area, including replacing the lost space. Another Member noted that a tough decision had to be made in order to address the existing problems and that it was vital to ensure that the residents of the estate were in good quality housing.
- The Commissioner for Environment and Open Space enquired as to whether the existing pathway in Kennedy Park was a legally defined footpath and was advised that it was not adopted but if it had been in use in excess of 20 years it was a prescriptive right of way.
- A Member raised the concern that the area outlined for appropriation regularly flooded and therefore, may be unsuitable for building upon. The Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal informed the Committee that groundwater / soak away testing of the area would commence within the next few weeks.
- With regard to access to the re-sited shops, the Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal advised that there would be better configuration of bus stops to improve access and that the Council was currently negotiating with First Busses to this avail.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report and subsequent communications received by the Borough Solicitor be noted.
- (b) That Cabinet be advised that the Committee endorsed the proposal to appropriate the land within Kennedy Park from open space to planning purposes and requested that the Council makes every effort to replace the open space within the Britwell and Haymill regeneration project.

60. Forward Agenda Plan

Resolved: - That the forward agenda plan be altered as detailed below:

- A report on the possibility of a budget for scrutiny to be submitted to the committee at its meeting on 25th February, 2010.
- The report on the works of the LSP (Including issues of racist attacks against Sikhs and Slough Against Violent Extremism), currently unprogrammed, to be submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 15th April, 2010.
- The 'Broom and Poplar – Performance of Pellings' item to be removed.

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61. Attendance Record

The attendance record was noted.

62. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm)