

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 7th October, 2010.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Bains, Bal, Basharat, Haines, O'Connor, Shine and Walsh.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Coad

PART 1

23. Declaration of Interest

Councillor Bal and Basharat declared a personal interest in that members of their family work for Slough Borough Council.

24. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 9th September, 2010

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 9th September, 2010 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

A member questioned whether the ONS had responded to the point raised and recommendations made by the Committee at the last meeting. Andrew Millard, Scrutiny Officer advised that, as far as he was aware, no response had been received. The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer seek a response from the ONS.

Resolved- That the Scrutiny Officer contact the ONS to obtain a response to recommendations from the last meeting.

25. Performance and Financial Reporting 2010 and Staff Appraisals

Roger Parkin, Strategic Director of Improvement and Development, outlined a report to update the Committee on the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management, covering the period up to and including August 2010.

The Committee noted the performance monitoring update which highlighted areas of exception, areas of improved performance, and provided an assessment of where improvement actions were needed for performance to achieve end of year targets. It was highlighted that a dedicated presentation on appraisal completion would be provided later in the meeting and this had been requested following concerns raised at the previous Committee.

The Director highlighted that the report comprised exceptions from the Balanced Score Card, which related to performance indicators selected by CMT members, and the Local Area Agreement Score Card. The Director discussed the indicators with red rag status where there was an area of

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concern, being NI 73 (achievements at level 4 or above in both English and Maths at key stage 2), NI 130 (clients and carers receiving self directed support/direct payments), NI 135 (carers receiving a specific carers services/information) and NI 157A (the processing of planning application).

The Committee noted the areas of significant improvement which included a number of indicators relating to Thames Valley Police. The Officer highlighted that NI 59 (percentage of initial assessments completed in year within 7 working days of referral) had improved significantly following staff training and the implementation of a new IT system. Members raised a number of questions/comments relating to the national indicators as follows (response shown in italics) :-

- A Member asked for further clarification on NI 73.
The Director advised that this year's provisional performance was 4% below the national average and stood at 70%, i.e. a 3% increase on the previous year's figure. The result showed a marked improvement but it was acknowledged that there was still some way to go.
- A Member asked for further clarification on NI 130.
The Officer advised that the Government had set targets to measure the number of clients and carers receiving direct payments. At present 391 individuals received direct payments but this was below the approximate target of 1255 clients. Measures were in place to increase the numbers and this would include monthly monitoring against targets and team worker reporting. It was highlighted that the new system was very challenging and presented a massive change to the previous system.
- Could further information be provided on NI 135?
It was explained that there were 285 carers services recorded, to the end of August and this indicator was below target. It had been expected that 430 carers services would have been provided by August 2010. It was highlighted that this indicator covered a large number of people and there had been a change in the way that the statistics were counted. It was suggested that the indicator be scrutinised further by the Health Scrutiny Panel.
- A Member commented that NI 73 had been looked at in some detail previously by the Raising Achievement Team. It was felt that the stage must have been reached where the Committee could receive more feedback on this item?
The Director advised that it could take eighteen months to see an improvement in the results of some indicators. It was suggested that the results of this indicator be considered further by the Education and Children Services Scrutiny Panel.
- Had any action been taken to improve the indicator for the processing of planning applications, NI 157A?

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There had been a significant drop in the number of major applications received in the previous year together with pressures on staff caused by a reduced number of employees. It was felt that this was not a significantly poor performance but there was an area of concern. It was suggested that the Director discussed this issue with the Strategic Director of Green and Built Environment and report back to the Committee. The Committee was also advised that the Council's income from fees reduced when less applications were received and it was possible that new regulations would be implemented to simplify the application process.

Finance

The Director advised that the Council's net Revenue Budget for 2010/11 was £103.9m and the agreed net operating budget for Housing Services 2010/11 was a surplus of £213K. The Committee noted that there was a projected underspend position of £206K which compared to a reported overspend at this stage in the previous year of £893K. The Housing Revenue Account had a current projected overspend position of £538K from the budgeted surplus position of £213K agreed at the beginning of the year and this showed an adverse variance of £101K from the position reported last month.

The Committee noted the month-on-month movement in variances and emerging issues and risks. It was highlighted that although the headline position indicated a projected underspend of £206K, it was important to note that a significant level of gross savings had had to be achieved incorporating the £3.3m of in year reductions that had been necessary following government cuts. The Committee noted the risks specific to each Directorate and the detail of opportunities that could emerge to mitigate any adverse financial occurrences.

The Director discussed the detail of efficiency savings, agreed base savings and in year savings for 2010/11.

In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of questions/comments as follows (response shown in italics):-

- What were the cost implications for the provision of a new independent residential facility where clients were placed. (Councillor Walsh)
It was agreed that the Director would provide a written response for the Member.
- It was anticipated that the outcome of two ongoing Employment Tribunal claims within the Adult Social Care division could result in legal costs which would escalate above budget provision. What was the detail of these cases? (Councillor Walsh).
It was agreed that the officer would provide a response to the Member directly.

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- When would the Committee be provided with an analysis of the implications of the comprehensive spending review on 20th October, 2010?
It was suggested that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive attend the next meeting of the Committee to present on the findings of the CPR.
- In respect of the Decent Homes Programme, what was the spend and had all of the homes been completed? (Councillor O'Connor).
It was agreed that the Strategic Director would respond to the Member directly on this matter.
- A Member commented that the actual figures were never provided – what was the actual spend?
There was no evidence of underspends occurring and all variances were shown in the report.
- What was the position of the Housing Revenues Account regarding Decent Homes relating to the ALMO. (Councillor Haines).
It was agreed that the Director would respond directly to the Member.
- Did each department prepare an audit/way forward on strategy and did they work in conjunction with each other?
This was the case and a meeting had been held in the previous week. It was reported that a Paper would be considered by Cabinet on the Council's strategy etc. A high level Paper would address the number of Directors and Assistant Directors in post and consultation would be held from now to December 2010.
- How many companies was the Council negotiating with and why did they not select smaller companies?
All companies where the contract was for more than £25,000 had been contacted recently and the Council was requesting a reduction in the licences. It was accepted that it would be helpful if the Council engaged more with smaller companies.
- Did the Council actively look at local companies?
A business conference was held every year at the Marriot Hotel when businesses were invited to learn more about the contracts process and tendering for work.
- Why was the Housing Subsidy rising whilst the stock was declining and the proportion had increased?
It was agreed that the Director would respond to this.

Appraisals

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director, Transformational Change, outlined a presentation on the measures that were being taken to improve the appraisal system. This had been requested by the Committee at its previous meeting

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when the concern was expressed in particular that Managerial staff were not meeting their appraisal objectives.

The Officer acknowledged that it was important to ensure that managers took responsibility for appraisals and feedback received from the attitude survey had indicated that staff had not previously fully appreciated the value of appraisals and some staff had never had one. The key message was that everyone was entitled to an appraisal, the development of staff was a priority, and it was important to simplify the link between what the council was trying to achieve and their work objectives.

The Committee was advised that briefings had been held for staff to discuss the new appraisal forms and process and an e-learning module had been launched as a tool available to everyone. Also a giving and receiving feedback course had been arranged to give managers more confidence in the process.

The revised appraisal format was simpler to understand and less bureaucratic. Both staff and unions had been consulted on the changes and clearer competencies had been identified to indicate areas for development.

Members raised a number of comments/questions in the ensuing debate including the following (response in italics):

- Did Managers go through all the competencies with staff during the appraisal process?
Yes this was the case – it was felt that there should be an overarching document to get the process on its feet.
- It was felt that the document should include a section where the areas in which a person was required to improve were identified.
- The concern was expressed that some individuals had a problem with managers who were unable to provide adequate feedback.
- Were staff provided with training to enable them to develop skills?
This was the case but in future this area could be challenging as there would be limits on spending in this area.
- It was felt that some particular sections of the community should be given more opportunities to gain employment.
The Officer advised that this was a matter for the Assistant Director, Human Resources to consider, and would perhaps be more suitably addressed by the Employment and Appeals Committee.
- Had the new Appraisal form been compared with those used by neighbouring boroughs?
The form had been developed through comparisons with those used by top performing local authorities and top organisations such as Marks and Spencer.

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- Were staff worried about the appraisal process?
The individual's manager's manager had been requested to sign off appraisals and it there was some evidence that many staff were nervous about the prospect of this person viewing their appraisal.
- What was the completion date for appraisals and when would 100% be completed?
It was hoped that Appraisals would be completed by March 2011.

Resolved –

- (a) That a report on NI 135 be submitted to the Health Scrutiny Panel.
- (b) That the results of NI 73 be considered and investigated further by the Education & Children Services Scrutiny Panel.
- (c) That the Strategic Director (I&D) check with the Strategic Director (G&B) about the performance of NI 157(a) and report back to the Committee.
- (d) That a report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th November, 2010 regarding the £10.8m HRA Capital Programme.
- (e) That the Leader and the Chief Executive be invited to attend Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 10th November 2010 to outline the likely impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review (20th October 2010).
- (f) That the Strategic Director (I&D) respond directly to Cllr Haines on an outstanding query Cllr Haines has relating to the ALMO/Decent Homes funding.
- (g) That the Strategic Director (G&B) respond to a further question by Cllr Haines questioning why the housing subsidy is rising whilst the stock is declining and the proportion has increased.
- (h) That future reports indicate how Managers are meeting the Council's appraisal objectives and targets.
- (i) That future reports show appraisal completion rates, particularly at 31st March, 2011.

26. Annual Attitude Survey - 2010

Naveed Mohammed, LSP Manager, Improvement and Development, outlined a report and presentation to inform the Committee of the results of the Slough Attitude Survey. It was noted that the survey was based on 1511 face to face interviews conducted between the 8th and 29th March, 2010 and the report compared the results with the last attitude survey that was held in 2007. The

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Committee noted the background and methodology to the survey and it was highlighted that the survey was now carried out on a bi-annual basis and the next one would be conducted in 2012.

The Committee was advised that satisfaction with SBC had reduced from 61% in 2007 to 57% in 2010 but the number of people who were neither satisfied or dissatisfied had increased by 4%. There was little change to the question "has the way the Council runs things got better or worse" and residents had indicated 76% satisfaction with "Slough as a place to live".

The Committee noted the results to other survey questions including aspects that required the most improvement and residents' views of the most important services.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the comprehensive presentation.

In the ensuing debate, Members raised a number of comments/questions including the following (response shown in italics):-

- A Member commented that he would have liked to have seen the format of the form that was used and also to have details in future of how many individuals were interviewed at ward level.
- Why was the figure of 1150 people chosen for the survey?
The figure was set in conjunction with the company who did the research and it was likely that the starting figure was 1500.
- Who would act on the findings of the survey?
The results were presented to the Local Strategic Partnership and the sustainable community strategy would be assessed to decide whether it needed reviewing following the results of the survey.
- Was there any merit in repeating the survey?
The officer responded that this was a matter for Members to decide.
- It was highlighted that the sample was very small and therefore this did not necessarily give an accurate account.
- It was felt that it would have been useful to include responses from the residents and tenants association to provide a more balanced report.

Resolved-

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- (a) That both the subject matter of the data provided and the overall response figure be broken-down by Ward and supplied to the Committee.
- (b) That the survey figure of 1511 be broken-down by Ward and supplied to the Committee.
- (c) That the Committee be informed of the extent to which the survey sample influenced the Primary School results which showed that (apparently) the importance attached to schooling is relatively low.

27. Member's Attendance Statistics

Resolved – That the report be noted.

28. Forward Agenda Plan

Resolved-

- (a) That it be noted that a report on the Accommodation Strategy will be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 2nd December.
- (b) That a report on the policy and cost of advertising space (billboards, bus station etc) be considered by the Committee at its next meeting on 10th November, 2010.
- (c) That a report on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme be considered by the Committee at its next meeting on 10th November, 2010.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm)