

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd March, 2011.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Dodds, Long, P K Mann, Parmar and Pantelic

Apologies:- Councillor Coad

PART I

70. Declarations of Interest

None.

71. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th January, 2011

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th January, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

72. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 27th January, 2011

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 27th January, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

73. Presentation by the Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police

Sara Thornton, CBE QPM, Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police (TVP) outlined a presentation on the strategy for policing in Thames Valley. Superintendent Richard Humphrey, TVP also contributed to the presentation. Ms Thornton advised that a zero based budget approach had been adopted and there had been collaborative working with other authorities. It was anticipated that a layer of staffing would be removed and the local policing model would have a resulting streamlined process. The Committee noted the percentage changes on serious acquisitive crime and violence against the person. Ms Thornton advised that the top priority for the force was to reduce crime, robbery and antisocial behaviour and increase police presence. Ms Thornton advised that the highest priority for neighbourhoods in Slough was antisocial behaviour with problems relating to drugs in second position.

The Committee noted the detail of the Medium Term Financial Forecast for Thames Valley Police and government funding for 2010/11 was £270,145m for the year 2010/11 reducing to £238,416m for the year 2014/15 presenting a reduction of 11.75% during this period. The cumulative shortfall in the budget for the year 2011/12 was £15.595m rising to £52.671m in the year 2014/15.

Ms Thornton advised that visible frontline policing would be protected and there would be targeted reductions for all other functions based on VFM profiles, risk and need. The TVP strategy for 2011-14 included the need to

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cut crimes that were of most concern to the community to increase the visible presence of the police, and to protect communities from the most serious harm. It was also necessary to improve communication with the public so that confidence and trust in communities could be built and to tackle bureaucracy and develop the professional skills of all staff. At the same time there was a need to reduce costs whilst protecting the frontline.

In the ensuing debate Ms Thornton responded to a number of questions which had been circulated in advance of the meeting (attached as annex to minutes).

Members raised a number of additional comments/ questions including the concern that there was not always a clearly visible police presence within local communities. Ms Thornton acknowledged the importance of this but highlighted that whilst it was appropriate to have police officers patrolling the town centre on foot, it was not cost effective to have police patrolling in other much larger areas. A member felt that PCSOs were highly valued in the community and asked whether their limited powers could be enhanced. Ms Thornton advised that the government was in the process of making some minor amendments to the powers that PCSOs had but they would not be allowed to move traffic or be involved in a process that could result in points being added to a driving licence. Ms Thornton was happy to further review the discretionary powers that were available to TVP and the Committee was welcomed to put forward suggestions regarding the use of PCSOs.

In response to a concern about Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs), Ms Thornton advised that there had been a problem with the rationale of some groups and in some areas there had been very poor attendance by members of the public necessitating the cancellation of meetings. There had also been a view in some rural areas that the work of NAGs was often duplicated by Parish Councils. Mr Humphrey advised that there were no plans to move away from supporting NAGs but there was a plan to streamline some groups which were poorly attended and it would be necessary to look at resources to tackle joint priorities.

A member commented that there had been more activity in drug crime in the last 5 years and asked how this would be tackled. Ms Thornton advised that many burglaries and crimes were driven by the drug habits of users and cited the example of a large operation which had taken place recently in Oxford recently involving the surveillance of drug suppliers. Many arrests had taken place and criminals would be continue to be targeted in similar operations.

Some members were concerned that the loss of back room staff would affect the provision of an adequate policing service. Ms Thornton advised that there was no option to retain back office services due to 25% cuts in budgets. It was clear that times were hard financially and the priority was to reduce crime but it was clear that there was no more funding available. Ms Thornton discussed the availability of the East Berkshire special payment and advised that it was likely this would not be continued.

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Several Committee members were concerned at the number of school age children who appeared not to be in school and walking the streets. It was suggested that the majority of these children were attending referral units for a number of hours each day and strictly speaking were therefore not missing from school. Superintendent Humphrey advised that the police worked closely with Heads of Schools to minimise truancy problems and asked members to contact him if they had any specific issues within their wards.

The Committee thanked Ms Thornton and Superintendent Humphrey for their presentation.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Committee thank Sara Thornton, Chief Constable, TVP, and her colleague Supt Richard Humphrey for their attendance and comprehensive responses to the questions submitted.
- (b) That the Committee notes the challenges that the Force faces in the coming years and its priorities.
- (c) That the Committee places on record its views that the visibility of Police Officers is maintained and that the discretionary powers of PCO's be enhanced where possible.
- (d) The Committee recommends that TVP continue to support the work of Neighbourhood Action Groups in Slough.
- (e) That the position regarding the continued threat of terrorism in Slough be noted.

74. Performance and Financial Reporting for 2010/2011

Julie Evans, Director of Resources and Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director, Professional Services outlined a report setting out the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management covering the period up to and including January 2011, against the SBC Council wide Balanced Score Card, the LAA Score Card. The report also detailed the revenue and capital monitoring position to January 2011.

The Committee was advised that the information provided on Workforce Planning on page 31 of the agenda contained an error and should read "A total of £8.1m savings" and not "£8001m" as shown. Members were also referred to a tabled Addendum document which set out a number of minor modifications to the report.

Performance

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director, Professional Services referred the Committee to the Gold project updates within the report and advised that five projects had an overall green status, three projects had an overall amber status and one had a red status. He advised the Committee that a full update on the Census 2011 would be provided at the next meeting in March.

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In response to a Member question regarding libraries, the Committee was advised that a report on this matter would be considered by the Community, Leisure and Environment Panel. The Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that the contract with Essex County Council for libraries had been signed and it was possible that a £30,000 saving could be achieved.

The Assistant Director, Professional Services referred to the exception report which provided an update on performance covering the period 1st April 2010 to 31st January, 2011, comprising exceptions from the balanced score card and the LAA score card. In relation to NI 130 – clients and carers receiving first directed support/direct payments, the Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that at the end of February, 27.5% of clients and cares were in receipt of personal budget or direct payment and the target for this area was 30%. There would be challenges in March and it was important to keep the target on track. The worst case scenario was estimated at a target of 2% less than required.

The Assistant Director discussed the position regarding Slough Schools Ofsted inspection reports where 52% of primary schools in Slough were currently considered to be below a good level. The Committee was advised that several corrective actions had been taken and a proposal was being developed to initiate a local school improvement board. It was highlighted that NI 117, the number of 16-18 year olds who were not in education, training or employment (NEET) had a pleasing performance of 0.6% above the current ambitious target of 4.3%. In the ensuing discussion a member asked why 52% of primary schools in Slough were currently considered to be below a good level and whether there were leadership issues, for example with Head teachers or governors? The Assistant Director advised that there was no one single issue common to all schools and work was being done to address these issues. It was highlighted that it was also important to engage schools so that they could support each other. A member commented that standards had improved in key stage 1 and key stage 3 but a £1.4m cut in budget would have an impact on schools.

In respect of NI 48 (children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents) a member advised that a suggestion to install 20mph speeds in some areas had been rejected by TVP on the grounds that speeds were impossible to Police. The member requested that this particular issue be added to the list of questions that had been considered during the chief Constable's presentation earlier in the meeting.

Financial Reporting

The Strategic Director of Resources referred the Committee to an amendment on page 34 of the agenda to indicate that for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) there was currently a projected surplus of £153k from the budgeted surplus position of £213k agreed at the start of the year. This was an adverse movement of £1.2m from the position reported at the 31st December, 2010. The Committee was also advised that paragraph 17.1 of the report had been updated to indicate that the position as at the end of January 2011 left an overall headline under spend position of £896k against the general fund

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revenue account. Against the HRA the position as at the end of January 2011 left an overall headline overspend position of £60k. Despite entering the final stages of the financial year close scrutiny continued to be required from the Directorate Management Teams to ensure 100% delivery and thus not weaken the base budget position for 2011/12 and beyond.

The Director advised that the HRA summary document would be circulated to Members. The Committee noted the month-on-month movement in variances within directorates, the treasury management changes to credit ratings of approved counter parties and the emerging issues/risks within each directorate. The Committee also noted the detail of the council's capital programme and the position on staffing budgets.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

75. Denise Alder, Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment

The Chair advised those present that this would be the last meeting attended by Mrs Denise Alder, Strategic Director of the Green and Built Environment. Mrs Alder was thanked for her contribution to the Overview and Scrutiny function and her immense contribution to the Council. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair wished Mrs Alder a happy retirement.

76. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Adoption 2011-2012

Kim Trotter, Finance Manager, Resources, outlined a report which was presented to Cabinet on 7th February, 2011. It was noted that the late release of the government's final subsidy determination had meant that the report was not available in time for the previous meeting of the Committee. The report proposed the Council's HRA budget for 2011-2012 and highlighted arrangements to fund the operation now that the Council had returned to in-house service provisions following the termination of the contract with People 1st (Slough) Ltd. The Committee was referred to Appendix 1 of the report which showed the 2011/2012 budget and included a forecast surplus of £0.087m for the year after a contribution of £1.93m to capital funding. It was anticipated that £1m of the revenue contributions to capital would be held in the capital expenditure reserve account as a contingency for the Decent Homes project expected to be completed in December 2012. The Committee noted the detail of the HRA base budget 2011/12 and that the final subsidy determination had seen management and maintenance allowances increased by 7.9% and 3.9% respectively. It was also noted that for the coming year HRA expenditure had been revised to take account of the new service structure and the cost centre hierarchy would be restructured so that individual service managers had clear responsibility for expenditure and budgets within their area. The Committee was advised that the Housing Repairs budget had been increased by 4.5% to allow for inflationary increases but it was difficult to make an accurate estimative inflation in the current economic climate. The Finance Manager discussed the use of £2.85m of HRA balances to maintain the current level of investment in homes and to complete the decent homes project in accordance with the Government's

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target. The Committee noted that the draft Tenant Participation Strategy would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in March and would allow tenants to become engaged and help to plan and regulate the new service. The Committee noted the HRA Business Plan projections which would give the Council a period of relative stability in the medium term with moderate in year surpluses and healthy balances. The Officer concluded that the HRA Business Plan was now sustainable into the medium term and had sufficient balances to allow continued levels of expenditure, introduced 2 years ago to clear historic backlogs of under investment.

In the ensuing debate the Finance Manager provided a response to a number of questions regarding changes to future housing subsidies. He advised that the housing subsidy system would be replaced by "Self-financing" regulations in 2011/12. HRA Income and costs had been projected over a 30 year period and a surplus had been forecast. This has an estimated value, using an average discount factor of 6.5%, at 31 March 2012, of £160m which was then taken as the total borrowing assumed to be payable by the Council into the national loan pool for all HRA dwellings. The Council currently had supported borrowing of £40m from this pool which would be deducted leaving a final payment to the treasury of £120m, to be actioned at the end of the year.

Resolved - That the Committee notes the recommendations that were approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 7th February, 2011.

- (a) That the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2011/2012 be approved.
- (b) That the growth items, identified in paragraphs 5.8 & 5.13, amounting to £303,000 in 2011/12 be approved.

77. Britwell and Haymill Regeneration Scheme- Update

John Rice, Interim Assistant Director, Property and Regeneration, provided the Committee with a verbal update on the Britwell and Haymill Regeneration Scheme. He advised that Cabinet had at its meeting on 7th February, 2011 considered a report setting out the latest developments and seeking approval to proceed with a series of works to enable progress to the Regeneration Scheme. The Committee was reminded that there had been uncertainty around the Homes and Community Agencies (HCA) funded residential element of the scheme due to the change in government and the effects of the comprehensive spending reviews which had cut the HCA budget. The HCA had now confirmed that a significant sum of monies would be available to the Authority before the end of the year to support measures to progress the regeneration.

The Committee was advised that at its meeting on 14th March, Cabinet would consider various matters including the issue of detailed planning consent for the residential element of the project, at Kennedy Park and negotiations would take place with SEGRO the public open space element of the land. The Assistant Director advised that residents had been consulted on options for

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major improvement works to Kennedy Park and the adjacent SEGRO land and a consultation document was tabled for members' information. Other measures under discussion included the appointment of a contractor to refurbish premises on Wentworth Avenue to create a facility to re-house the Britwell library and community facilities.

The Committee noted that Cabinet would consider the demolition of the garage court to the rear of Wentworth Avenue and the requirement for Officers to work with the Britwell Scouts and Guides Groups to identify and agree alternative accommodation for their premises, possibly on the Wentworth Industrial Estate.

In response to a member question regarding the consultation, Kate Pratt, Communications, SBC advised that the consultation document had been distributed to 4,000 properties.

Resolved – That the update report be noted.

78. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the report be noted.

79. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – That the report be noted.

80. Date of Next Meeting- Thursday 31st March, 2011

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 31st March, 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)

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Member Questions – written responses from the Chief Constable

Resources

The force spends **less per head of population on officers** and staff than peer forces, but more on **non-staff costs such as premises and transport**.

1. What steps are you taking to reduce the **non-staff costs of policing**?

The non-staffing costs where we are outliers are custody, transport and premises. In respect of custody, our costs appear high because we have a contract to employ a company – most other forces use directly employed officers or staff and therefore do not have this cost. On transport we are reducing our spend year by year but our higher costs are caused in part by the large geographic area we cover which requires an emergency response. On premises we are reducing our premises costs year on year but we rent more buildings than other forces and this increase our revenue costs. Our conditions insist that expenditure on refurbishment is taken from the revenue rather than capital budget. For example we will spend £460K on Slough police Station this year.

2. Since so many of the local crime rates rely on a **population estimate** denominator, what is the Chief Constable's view on the level of undercounting in official population estimates, and what steps are they taking to ensure the **Census 2011** provides an adequate estimation of total residents?

This has been highlighted as an issue in Slough and the undercounting is a product of several factors such as multi-occupancy dwellings, many of which are common features of urban areas. We have been active in helping to identify 3,000 occupied sheds in Slough and have assisted the council in raising awareness among residents of the importance of completing a census return.

3. Why does Thames Valley receive a higher proportion of total funding from **council tax than peer forces**?

The Value for Money tables show that we are 6th out of 8 in our family for formula funding and this has been the case over many years. In response to the Police Authority we raised the precept to provide adequate protection to the people of Thames Valley. Therefore the level of precept puts us 2nd out of 8 in our family.

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4. Slough compares very poorly with other towns in the Thames Valley region – are your resources **proportionate** to the amount of crime in the borough?

Funding from April 2011 is allocated to local policing areas (LPAs) according to the following resource allocation formula: 30% for population size; 35% for the level of recorded crime and 35% for the volume of incidents. This means that Slough receives 8% of the resource allocation rather than 6.25% which would be the case if resources were spread evenly across the 16 LPAs.

5. The local population is likely to blame the Borough Council for all poor performance in the town, including crime levels whether or not it was directly responsible.

a) In your view, what aspects of **coordinated** activity between the Council and the Police could most beneficially be improved, and how could members (in our standing as community representatives / leaders) become actively involved in reducing crime levels?

The council and the police work closely together to improve community safety outcomes for communities in Slough. At present this entails seeking co-location, information sharing and co-ordinated and joint tasking at neighbourhood and borough level. Members are invited to contribute to crime reduction initiatives such as the following:

- Greater engagement with Neighbourhood Action Groups
- Supporting joint initiatives aimed at 'hard to reach' and vulnerable groups
- Supporting initiatives aimed at improving educational achievement
- Supporting joint early intervention initiatives
- Through engagement with the local policing area (LPA) command consultative process.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) actively supports effective information sharing around anti-social behaviour and members' support for this initiative would be greatly welcomed. The new approach to identifying areas of risk and tasking joint resources is already leading to better outcomes for victims of ASB.

Members are invited to consider further investment in the ANPR infrastructure to support the detection of crime.

6. There will be significant reductions in the force's budget – where will cuts be made?

There will be no cuts made to visible front line policing including Neighbourhood policing and patrol. There will be targeted reductions for all other functions based on value for money profiles, risk and need.

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Crime rates and performance

7. Confidence in the ability of Thames Valley Police and the local authorities to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour is still a concern – the latest inspection gives Thames Valley Police a **fair rating**

The assessment of confidence was based on the measure for the discontinued single confidence target of the previous Government. In the 12 months to September 2009 the confidence level was 51.5% for Thames Valley. This gave us a 'Fair' rating from HMIC. Data for the confidence measure was collected through the national British Crime Survey which provides results at police force level only. While we are 5th out of 8 in our family of forces, nationally we were 16th out of 43 forces – easily in the top half.

From a local point of view we were monitoring the same measure of confidence through our own confidence surveys as required by the Home Office. These surveys enable us to produce performance data at LPA level. In the 12 months to June 2009 confidence in Slough was 57.8% which rose to 65.8% in the 12 months to June 2010.

8. Data shows that for seven key recorded offences in 2009-10, Slough was in the **highest three authorities** in Thames Valley for each crime. **Why is this?**

Milton Keynes, Reading and Slough have always been the top three authorities in Thames Valley for levels of recorded crime. These areas have the highest concentration of population and other factors associated with higher levels of crime including levels of deprivation; greater numbers of young people and a more transient population. Changes in crime levels for each offence type are monitored carefully and any statistically significant upward changes are prioritised for swift action. Overall all crime is down by 4.1% in 2010-11 compared to 2009-10, which equates to 644 fewer offences.

9. Slough has **high levels of anti-social behaviour** and is one of the seven worst local authority areas for fear of crime and anti-social behaviour according to the Place Survey 2008. **How is the force going to be able to turn this around?**

The Place survey was suspended in 2010 and like for like data will be difficult to obtain. However police monitoring of ASB data shows a reduction of 12% (792 fewer incidents) in 2010-11 compared to 2009-10. This reduction has been achieved through effective and efficient data collection, information sharing and analysis leading to focused joint agency tasking and improved outcomes for victims. Fear of crime forms a critical strand to the LPA commander's community consultative process. Key initiatives include expansion and delivery of community messaging, proactive engagement with the media and reassurance as part of all proactive and reactive policing operations.

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10. Slough has a recognised high level of **drug-related crime**, and has been funded by the Home Office for several years as an 'intensive' Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) area. **If the funding for the intensive Drug Intervention Programme is reduced or stopped** how will you ensure that Thames valley police will continue the work in this area and ensure **commitment to this agenda?**

The drug testing grant for 2011-12 is derived from a new finance model. The new model is based on the volume of total tests and volume of positive tests carried out by forces in 2009-10. Furthermore, funding for Police Strategic Leads has been consolidated into the Police DIP Grant from 2011-12 onwards. The indicative allocation for Thames Valley Police area to conduct testing on arrest and charge in 2011-12 is up slightly this year, to £647,496.

TVP's commitment to the DIP strategic delivery within Slough has always been a strong and positive one. DIP has now been further aligned to the wider Integrated Offender Management (IOM) agenda and meetings have been combined. This ensures that partnership working remains a high priority and that any funding or service provision issues can be discussed and changes implemented as and when they arise.

11. Slough has one of the highest rates for **Assault with less serious injury**, what is your strategy for dealing with this?

Slough has seen a 16.7% reduction in assault with less serious injury in 2010-11 compared with 2009-10 and has a detection rate of 35%. The strategy for dealing with this crime are effective partnership activity (Council; DAAT; Licensing; police intelligence) to ensure preventive action and targeted deployment of resources; effective and timely initial scene and victim response; and daily senior police management scrutiny and prioritisation.

Priorities

12. Given the priorities on tackling community concerns - Will the force be continuing to support the Neighbourhood Action Groups?

Understanding local priorities and delivering a local service is at the heart of the Force local policing restructure. Neighbourhood policing resourcing levels will be protected. NAGs are an important element of this as part of our 'Have Your Say' campaign.

13. Given that the funding for the **Prevent Agenda** has been reduced (removed) and the targets abolished – what priority are we giving this area. **Is this still a priority for Slough?**

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It remains a priority for Slough and support from Members for PREVENT strategies in the Borough was requested at a recent briefing by the LPA commander and the South East Counter Terrorist Unit.

Actions ongoing within Slough include:

- Active engagement with vulnerable groups
- Partnership Slough Olympics
- Schools and higher education PREVENT programme
- Ongoing community engagement events including Operation Nicole II
- Specific local commander engagement in places of worship
- Joint SBC / Police Supporting Vulnerable Individuals panel

Future

14. What strategy do we have in place for security presence at the Olympics?

We are working closely with other Olympic forces and have developed comprehensive plans for the whole of the summer's events in 2012.

15. The policing pledge stated that police officers will spend 80% of their time on the beat. **Did we meet that target here in Slough?**

The Pledge commitment related to neighbourhood policing and in Slough the abstraction rate for neighbourhood police teams was 3.1% in May 2010. The Policing Pledge was removed in May 2010 and this data is no longer collated.

16. The **Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill** makes a number of proposed changes. What is the Force's view on the **Bill's proposals**? Particularly, which aspects are most likely to be beneficial to the residents of Slough?

It is vital that the police are held to account to elected representatives and governments choose the means by which this is achieved. An elected police commissioner for Thames Valley will produce a policing plan covering the force area. A police and crime panel will provide a scrutiny function for the Commissioner and will comprise representatives from the force's composite local authorities.

It is also vital that the police have operational independence and that chief constables are able to direct resources using their professional expertise. The role of police commissioners should be to decide on priorities and then hold the chief constable to account for their delivery.

There is a need for a proper balance between local and national priorities. All police forces have national responsibilities for tackling terrorism and serious organised crime. It is important that the elected police commissioners have due regard to these aspects of the strategic policing requirement.

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The Bill also covers changes to the 2003 Licensing Act. The Act supports licensing authorities to take action locally, within a revised licensing framework giving local authorities greater control over alcohol licensing. Licensing authorities, Primary Care Trusts and Local Health Boards will become 'responsible authorities', gaining the power to intervene in licensing applications and to take action against existing premises licences where there are problems. This will give power to NHS trusts to oppose applications for new alcohol licenses where public health could be put at risk.

Councils will be able to require late night operators who supply alcohol between midnight and 6am to pay a levy in addition to their existing licence fees. The levy would be payable to licensing authorities, who would then deduct their administrative costs and could then use up to 30% of the levy income in providing extra measures to reduce or prevent crime and disorder. The remaining 70% of levy income must be paid to the police to pay for the extra policing.