

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 7th June, 2011.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Basharat, Davis, Haines, Minhas, Munawar, O'Connor, Plenty and Smith

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Matloob and Parmar

PART I

1. Declaration of Interest

None.

2. Minutes - 31st March, 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st March, 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Appointment of Scrutiny Panels

The Committee considered a report recommending the re-appointment of the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels for the 2011/12 municipal year (it was noted that the number of Panels had reduced from four to three). The Committee noted the seat allocations that had been calculated to reflect Political Group membership and statutory proportionality entitlement, which equated to 6 appointments to be offered to the Labour Group, 2 to the Conservative Group and 1 to the BILLD Group. The Chairs of the Panels would be offered to a member of the Administration and it had been indicated that the three Vice-Chair positions would be offered to the Opposition Group. Details of the nominations received from the political groups were noted and the Committee was requested to appoint the 3 Scrutiny Panels and the members nominated. Details were also presented of the co-opted members for formal approval.

Resolved -

- (a) That the Panels set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report be appointed for the 2011/12 municipal year.
- (b) That the Committee note the allocation of seats to the Panels as set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report.
- (c) That the Committee agree the allocation of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Panels on the basis set out in paragraph 5.3 and that the Panels be invited to appoint their Chairs and Vice-Chairs at their first meetings.
- (d) That Members be appointed to serve on each of the Panels in accordance with the wishes expressed by Political Groups in respect of seats allocated to them as set out in paragraph 5.4 of the report.
- (e) That the co-opted Member listed in paragraph 5.6 of the report be appointed to the Education & Children's Services Panel.

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4. Member Questions

Two verbal questions were submitted regarding the identification of the relevant officer on parking enforcement correspondence and the current position on Broom and Poplar. It was agreed that the Director of Resources would arrange a response for the relevant members.

The Committee discussed the preferred option for the notification of future member questions and it was suggested that it would be helpful if questions were submitted in advance of the meeting in order that a full response be provided.

Resolved – That future questions be submitted 5 clear working days in advance of the meeting so that a written response by the relevant Director can be provided at the meeting.

5. Outturn 2010-11 Performance and Finance Report

Julie Evans, Director of Resources, introduced a report setting out the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management for the period up to and including March 2011 against exception performance monitoring and outlining the revenue and capital monitoring position.

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director, Professional Services, referred the Committee to the performance aspect of the report including the SBC Corporate Scorecard setting out exceptions, and the Gold Project update which provided individual project progress reports. It was noted that of the 8 active gold projects, 5 had an overall green status, 2 had an amber status and none of the projects had a red status. The Culture, Learning and Library Service Transformation programme had now been completed and the Committee was advised that the closure report was being developed.

Members asked a number of detailed questions about various projects including the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme. It was agreed that the Assistant Director would take these questions to the next Project Board meeting and provide a response to all Committee members. Further questions were submitted regarding the Britwell and Haymill Regeneration project and the Director advised that previously this had been classed as more than one project incorporating several separate elements. The Director responded to a number of questions regarding the Town Hall and the provision of future committee facilities. The Committee was advised that in the medium term the building would be used as a school but it was hoped that the scheme would incorporate council use of the building outside of school hours. Interim arrangements for meetings at St Martin's Place would be explored together with the use of alternative facilities at the Centre. The Director also advised that designers would be sympathetic to the protection of the core section of the building but highlighted that the Town Hall did not have listed building status and she had not yet viewed the designs for the building.

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In response to a question regarding the provision of storage, the Director advised that it was a statutory requirement that some documents must be retained for six years but it was not necessary to store these documents on site and the Council used an archive facility at Berkshire Records Office in Reading. In response to a further question the Director advised that she would forward details of the cost of this facility to the Committee.

The Committee debated the performance of NI50 – Emotional Health of Children and the way in which this indicator was measured. Key Stage 2 results were also discussed and it was clear that contributory factors included the fact that in many homes English was not a first language. It was agreed that a response to a question regarding the failure to meet the target for library visits would be forwarded to the Committee.

Financial Reporting

Members considered the financial position that had been presented and the Director of Resources explained the under spend for 2010/11. The Committee discussed the variances and how the underspends were treated with regard to virement and carry forwards. The Committee noted the position regarding education budgets and that the rules on Academies were tighter than community schools.

The Committee welcomed Emma Foy who had been appointed to the position of Head of Finance.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6. Economic Downturn and the Effect on Slough - Update

Shabnam Ali, Economic Development Policy Officer, outlined a report to provide an update on the Economic Downturn as requested previously at the Committee meeting on 10th November 2010.

It was highlighted that unemployment in April 2011 was 3.9%, compared to 2.5% in the South-East of England and 3.7% nationally. This reflected an increase to 3,343 residents, up by 169 residents from November, 2010. It was noted that of those claiming job seekers allowance, 2350 people had been unemployed for up to six months and 630 people for between 6 and 12 months. The number of claimants over 12 months had risen to 360 and it was felt that it was long term unemployment which would have potential serious and deep societal impacts.

The Committee noted the provision of employment support, the availability of new jobs and the establishment of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The Officer concluded that the Slough economy was recovering at a very steady rate but much uncertainty and concern about real economic stability and growth remained.

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The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the measures being taken to encourage retailers to come to Slough and the proportion of jobs which were filled by local residents. The Committee also discussed the skills mix in Slough and the importance of ensuring that 16-24 year olds were encouraged to engage with the voluntary sector. The Chief Executive suggested that a systematic approach to voluntary work could be considered.

It was agreed that a table of current statistics would be circulated to the Committee together with details of the number of persistent unemployed residents in Slough. It was also agreed that details of the number of job vacancies generated by the Heart of Slough schemes would be provided to the Committee in respect of the number of local permanent contractors.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

7. Census 2011- Update

Naveed Mohammed, Scrutiny Officer, outlined a report providing an update on the delivery of the Census 2011 project in Slough. The Officer discussed the delivery of the project and operational phase 2. Feedback to date suggested that the response rate across Slough had been universally better than in 2001. The Committee noted the importance of the quality assurance phase and that there was no formal deadline for the submission of information and data. Slough would therefore continue to submit data on an as and when basis and this would be helpful where there was new evidence on sheds and HMO's. The Officer discussed the overall impact of the 2011 census project, and the key lessons learnt.

The Officer concluded that so far the project appeared to have been a success in increasing the response rate and the investment in the quality assurance process should reinforce a higher population figure.

The Committee discussed a number of areas of concern including the statistics for the Colnbrook with Poyle area, the lack of permanent translation services in the town, and the number of HMO's in the town. The Chief Executive emphasised that the changed to boundaries in 2004 would be based on the numbers registered on the electoral role and not on the population statistics gathered through the census.

Resolved-

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the ONS be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 12th July, 2011 to discuss a number of issues including data quality, quality assurance and the continuing gap.

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8. Future Provision of Transactional Services for Slough Borough Council - Progress Update Report

Philip Hamberger, Assistant Director, Commercial and Transactional Services, outlined a report to update the Committee on the progress to-date regarding the procurement and establishment of the Transactional Services Centre in Slough.

The Assistant Director discussed the management of risks which would be identified and managed through existing risk management policies and reported on a regular basis. It was emphasised that it was important to drive the venture forward quickly and the Committee was referred to the procurement timetable. It was noted that 8 suppliers had completed pre-qualifying questionnaires and had submitted an outline solution. All potential suppliers had attended an evaluation workshop on 28th March 2011 and the feedback received was positive. 300 questions were raised by suppliers following an invitation to submit an online solution/invitation to participate dialogue and these were answered in line with the timetable. All 8 companies had submitted bids which were being evaluated and dialogue meetings were scheduled for the week commencing 13th June, 2011. The Assistant Director concluded that the procurement phase was going well and on schedule. Further reports would be provided to the Committee as the project developed.

In response to a member question, the Assistant Director confirmed that Transactional Services would be added to the Gold Project report as a standard item. The Committee requested that an update report be provided at its next meeting.

Resolved-

- (a) That the proposed recommendations to Cabinet be noted.
- (b) That an update report be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting on 12th July, 2011.

9. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/ for information

No reports were received.

10. Forward Work Programme

A number of suggestions were made regarding items to be considered by the Committee. It was suggested that the concern regarding incidents of abuse in Care Homes highlighted recently in the press be considered by the Committee and it was agreed that this matter would be referred to the Health Scrutiny Panel for consideration. It was also agreed that a request to discuss the Council's current policy on the Right to Buy Scheme be referred to the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

The programme was updated as follows:

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- 12th July 2011- Future Provision of Transactional Services for Slough Borough Council (update report).

Resolved – That the Work Programme be noted.

11. Date of Next Meeting - 12th July, 2011

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 12th July, 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.19 pm)