

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 11th October, 2011.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Grewal, Long, Rasib and Swindlehurst

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Haines

PART I

29. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

30. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11th October, 2011

The minutes of the last meeting held on 11th October, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

31. Member Questions

None were received.

32. Highway Changes in Chalvey

Gillian Ralphs, Assistant Director, Transport and Planning, introduced three Officers from Thames Water who gave a presentation detailing the current position on the replacement of water mains in Chalvey. The Committee was advised that the scheme was necessary to increase the security of the water supply in the Chalvey area by reducing leakage and reducing the number of bursts and future disruption from repairs. It was noted that £1.5m had been invested and this was one of the first schemes to replace full mains in the Thames Valley Region. The Committee noted the detail of the construction programme for Chalvey Road West and that final testing and commissioning excavations had prevented the Council from taking the site over, therefore a 10 day extension was necessary so that the site could be completely cleared.

The Assistant Director emphasised that the works being carried out by Thames Water were completely separate and unconnected to the experimental road proposals for the Chalvey area. Jo Carter, Head of Transport, outlined a report detailing the history of these proposals and providing an update on the latest progress of the scheme. The Officer discussed the consultation which had been carried out with the Chalvey community in November 2009 when the amount of traffic in Chalvey Road West was cited as one of the biggest problems in the community. Respondents to the consultation had identified a number of priorities which

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included the need to improve the appearance of streets and open spaces, improve pavements and access for pedestrians, improvements to deter rat running in the locality and the closure of Chalvey Road West. Respondents had also prioritised the need for a one way system in Ledgers Road and Chalvey Road East and the provision of new parking. All of the suggestions provided had been reflected in the current experimental proposals.

The Officer discussed the history of the decision to implement the proposals and advised that the Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal and officers had met with approximately 40 members of the Chalvey community. Meetings were held with a range of individuals and residents groups and very diverse views and suggestions were received; it was therefore not possible to achieve a consensus on a preferred option. At its meeting on 18th July, Cabinet had decided to implement a range of experimental measures which would allow the community to comment on their advantages and disadvantages and provide feedback to the Council before any decision to implement permanent change was made. The Committee noted the detail of the experimental measures implemented.

Following a protest made by members of the Chalvey community it was decided not to close Chalvey Road West but to make this road one way east bound toward the railway bridge. The Officer discussed the progress with the delivery of the project and advised that the implementation of the measures had been planned to follow on from the Thames Water scheme to replace water mains across Chalvey. Public engagement would be carried out before November and a second phase would be carried out from November 2011 to February 2012 by way of meetings with identifiable groups and drop in sessions. The proposed public engagement would assess whether the proposed measures were welcomed by the Chalvey community.

Councillor Swindlehurst, Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal, addressed the Committee and discussed the progress of the scheme. He highlighted that concerns had been raised by members of the business community in Chalvey regarding the disruption that had been caused to their businesses. He advised that business relief forms had been forwarded to businesses in the area and noted that generally there was support for the scheme.

A Chalvey resident addressed the Committee and advised that she supported the one way system which had resulted in an improvement to the locality. She discussed a number of areas of concern including the unacceptable and dangerous speeding of vehicles in Ledgers Road and the lack of proper inclusive consultation which prevented members of the community from participating through language barriers.

Two further resident expressed concerns regarding safety aspects of the works, confusing sign posting and the lack of accessibility for disabled individuals and the phasing of lights near the bridge.

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In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of questions/ comments regarding the Thames Water work and the experimental road scheme. A Member was concerned that residents had not been told what was going on and it appeared that workers were on site only for a few hours and then left. He asked what compensation was available for businesses in the area. Thames Water advised that they had conducted a letter drop for residents and businesses and another update would be provided by the end of the following week. He advised that anyone who had concerns about the loss of business income could write to Thames Water at the address provided on their website to obtain information regarding submitting a claim. In response to a number of other questions raised Thames Water advised that when they left the site each day they ensured that the site was in a secure state and that there had been no other option than to close Chalvey Road West for safety reasons. In response to a number of other questions and concerns regarding the duration of the Thames Water works and the disruption caused, the Assistant Director emphasised again that it was important to separate the disruption caused by Thames Water from the experimental scheme. The disruption currently being encountered resulted from Thames Water works and there had been no other option because it was essential to update the water mains.

A Member questioned how the wider Slough community had been consulted because Chalvey Road was a major artery through Slough from east to west. Bearing in mind there were works going on for the Heart of Slough scheme, Chalvey Road was a major alternative route- why could the traffic phases not have been experimented with? The Assistant Director reminded the Committee that many of the consultation questions had centred on environmental issues and residents had confirmed that improvements which reduced dirt and grime were very important. It was emphasised that Chalvey was a community and not just a rat run for traffic. The Committee was also advised that there would be an embargo on road works during the run up to Olympic games and for this reason there had been no other option but to carry out the Thames Water works and the Heart of Slough works at the same time.

In response to a question regarding attracting customers to Chalvey from outside the locality, the Committee was advised that more parking spaces would be available for shoppers and it was important to deter rat runners. The Head of Transport confirmed that he was aware there were currently issues with the increased traffic on Montem Lane but it would not be possible to install a pedestrian crossing because statutory requirements were not satisfied in this case. It would be possible however to react quickly to any problems with traffic on Montem Lane.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that an update report be provided in January 2012.

33. **Medium Term Financial Planning/ Budget Strategy 2012/13 to 2015/16**

Emma Foy, Acting Head of Finance, outlined a report and presentation, setting out the latest projections of the Council's revenue and capital budget

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for the period 2012/13 to 2015/16, which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th October, 2011. The report set out a proposed strategy for securing savings requirements whilst maintaining the focus on protection for front line services wherever possible.

The Committee was reminded that following the change of government in May 2010, significant cuts to public sector spending had been implemented and these were in addition to the efficiency requirements the council already had in place. Any new investment in Slough's communities would have to be contained within the constraints of this severely restricted cash envelope. The Officer discussed the cumulative effect of the impact of the financial pressures affecting the council and the resulting reduction in spending cuts. The Committee was referred to the detail within table 1 of the report; the SBC Medium Term Financial Model 2010/11 to 2015/16. The projected overall shortfall across the medium term period was £15.629m and initial proposals would present savings opportunities of £8.842m, leaving a current deficit across the period of £6.787m.

For the medium to longer-term, given the scale of the expected funding reductions, it was likely that radical reform of the Council's structure and service provision would be required. The Officer advised that the desired savings would involve the transformation of some services and different delivery methods for others but Members remained committed to protecting the interest of both existing and future staff. It was hoped that compulsory redundancies would only be considered as a last resort and that a combination of voluntary severances or early retirement arrangements would be considered whilst securing redeployment opportunities where possible.

The Committee noted the detail of a number of pressures anticipated in future years, including a reduction in Council Tax Benefit funding, and other proposals which could affect future financial stability such as the transfer of responsibilities for Public Health and a single universal credit benefit system. Members noted the detail of the £8.845m of savings required across the next 2 financial years.

The Committee noted the latest Revenue Budget projections arising from SBC's current Medium Term Financial Plan for 2011/12 to 2014/15 and a number of key assumptions. It was highlighted that inflation was expected to continue to rise above government expectations and an adjustment has been made to reflect this. Only essential growth would be entertained and would likely be funded by finding compensatory savings. Members had agreed to further explore the potential benefits of a LABV and this would be built into the capital financing assumptions and could provide a short-term financial gain. The overall HRA capital programme was £25.357m for the period 2012/13 to 2016/17 and the programmed spend for 2011/12 was £7.882m.

The Officer concluded that the main foreseen risk was that the proposed savings would not be delivered and the budget would therefore be closely monitored via the monthly financial management reports. Updated budget

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information, including savings achieved, would be reported to Cabinet throughout the financial year.

In the ensuing debate the Committee discussed a number of issues including the recurring under spend, the use of zero based budgets and the risk in relying too heavily on the Voluntary Sector. The Officer was asked whether in the current economic climate it was likely that there would be a positive take up by staff in terms of requests for Voluntary Redundancy or Early Retirement and was advised that it was likely a number of staff in their later years may wish to benefit from current pension provisions. It was confirmed that it was unlikely there would be any forced redundancies at this stage.

In response to a question regarding the Council's debt position, the Officer advised that a lot of social care debt had accrued over the years which had been difficult to collect but tools would now be put in place to collect this.

Resolved- That the Committee note the recommendations that will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th October, 2011.

34. Project Performance and Financial Reporting for 2010/11

Emma Foy, Acting Head of Finance, outlined a report setting out the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management covering the period up to and including August 2011 against the Council's Gold projects and revenue and capital monitoring position.

The Officer provided a summary on the projects and advised that the 2011 Census project had now been completed. Of the 9 remaining active projects, 5 had been assessed as having an overall green status, 3 had an overall amber status and none had an overall red status. The recently added Safeguarding Improvement Plan had not yet been allocated a RAG status.

The Committee noted the detail of the various projects within the report and asked a number of questions. A particular concern was raised regarding the significant PPRG savings targets identified for learning disability budgets as this was a frontline service. The Officer advised that she would provide further information and this would be circulated to all Committee Members through the Democratic Services Officer. In relation to the school places in Slough Gold project, a Member asked for further information on which schools would expand in future and he also questioned why it was necessary to send so many children to schools out of the Borough. The Officer advised that she would discuss this matter with the Strategic Director, Education and Children's Services and circulate further details to all Committee Members.

Resolved - That the Committee note the recommendations that will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th October, 2011

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35. Sustainable Community Strategy- Refresh

Tracey Luck, Head of Policy and Communications, outlined a report setting out the draft refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th October, 2011.

The Committee was advised that it was necessary to refresh the SCS so that the overall strategic direction and long term vision for the Borough would be sufficiently articulated and coordinated, to meet the needs of the Borough's communities. It was noted that the Government had decided to repeal the duty to prepare a SCS but local authorities were still expected to work with partners and local communities to develop shared strategies for what they needed to improve in their areas. A decision had therefore been taken to review Slough's SCR and take into account a number of issues such as economic changes, the emerging emphasis on community engagement and responsibility, and the removal of the duty to maintain a Local Area Agreement

The Committee noted that consultations were carried out to refresh the SCS including a workshop with council staff, stakeholders and partners. The strategy was supported by an Action Plan which would be developed over the coming months. Once the SCS had been agreed the governance structure of the Council's Local Strategic Partnership would be reviewed to ensure that the Board and its Partnership Delivery Groups were able to deliver the new priorities in the most effective way.

The Committee noted the detail of the draft SCS set out within the report.

Resolved- That the Committee endorse the draft refreshed Community Strategy.

36. Accommodation Strategy Update

Roger Parkin, Strategic Director of Customer and Transactional Services, outlined a report to provide an update on the progress to date in implementing the Council's Accommodation Strategy.

The Committee was reminded that following the decision to demolish the 1970s part of the Town Hall there was a need to relocate over 500 members of staff to other Council buildings whilst also improving customer access to services. It was also necessary to accommodate the return of Housing Services staff to SBC management and consider the creation of the Transactional Services Hub. The Director advised the Committee that office moves had gone well due to the hard work of the Facilities Team which was greatly appreciated.

It was recommended to CMT that the new Housing Services be relocated to the Centre which had a long term lease in place. The 15 month lease in place at Airways House tied in with plans to develop the Transactional Services Hub with an external service provider, who could possibly chose to relocate

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elsewhere within the town. The Committee noted the progress made to date regarding the refurbishment of St Martins Place, the Centre and Airways House and the detail of the office moves schedule.

The Committee noted a number of outstanding accommodation issues and further office moves. Although the vast majority of staff had already been moved from the Town Hall site, a few services, including Democratic Services and Printing Services were due to move over the next few weeks with a view to all services being relocated by the end of December 2011. A number of other outstanding issues currently being addressed included a review of the reception arrangements at St Martins Place and improvements to the CCTV room (to remain in Town Hall).

Resolved- That the Committee note the current position.

37. Procurement of Transactional Services for Slough Borough Council

Philip Hamberger, Assistant Director, Commercial and Transactional Services, outlined a report to update the Committee on the progress made since the last report in June on the procurement and establishment of the Transactional Services Centre in Slough.

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting on 9th November, 2010, Cabinet had agreed that Officers be instructed to commence the most appropriate procurement process to engage with suitable service providers to attract a partner to establish a regional Transaction Services Hub in Slough.

At its meeting on 13th June, 2011, Officers were instructed by Cabinet to continue with the competitive dialogue process for the preparation of the 'Invitation to Submit a Detailed Solution' and this had now been completed. It was noted that the evaluation process had taken longer than originally specified as it had been necessary to clarify technical and financial aspects of the submissions. It was then necessary to revise the timetable to allow the evaluation team to decide which supplier would be shortlisted.

It was noted that the revision to the timetable would not impact on the contract start date and allowed for an efficient handover and transition period. The invitation to submit a Final Tender was currently being developed and it was noted that the specification would be required to deliver the Council's required efficiencies of £1.5 m as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Officer concluded that the procurement phase was going well and on line to start the contract in April 2012.

In response to a Member question, the Committee was advised that staff would be transferred to the appointed company through the 'TUPE' process unless an individual had opted to go down the expressions of interest route. The Officer was unable to confirm whether there would be any redundancies imposed but highlighted again the obligation that staff must be transferred under TUPE. The Committee was advised that it was a condition of the

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contract that the work/ operation must be based in Slough and not moved to another area without the Council's consent.

Resolved- That the report be noted and that an update report be provided on 6th December, 2011.

38. Housing Benefit Reforms and the Impact on Slough

Brian Daly, Housing Assessment Manager, outlined a report to advise Members of the impact of the Government's current and proposed changes to the housing benefit system and how the impact of these changes was being addressed.

The Committee noted that Housing demand in Slough had increased by 30% in the past 18 months and the Government's welfare reforms would likely lead to a greater demand for the Council's services. There was a concern that more people would move to Slough where rents were predicted to remain more affordable and there was evidence that some London local authorities were already seeking to secure housing from Slough landlords.

The Officer discussed the financial implications of the reform for benefit claimants. Nationally, households would lose on average £12 per week and it was thought that in Slough, some would be faced with a reduction of £180 per week due to the abolishing of the 5 bedroom rate and the LHA rates being set at the 30th percentile from the median as it was. The reforms presented 2 critical issues: the potential increase in housing need and poverty and the possible reduction in the supply of privately rented accommodation (the Council's main tool for preventing homelessness).

The Committee noted the Government changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the resulting implications. The Officer also discussed aspects of housing supply and demand in Slough and advised that the demand for social housing already outstripped supply by 11:1. It was noted that 100 new applicants had been registered per month since the start of 2011 and that 6,645 households were on the waiting list. Homelessness approaches had increased at a very fast rate, with numbers approaching highs of 10 years ago. This had increased demand on temporary accommodation and within the private rented sector in Slough. Homelessness had increased from around 21 approaches per month in 2009 to 34 per month this year so far which equated to an increase of 62%.

The Officer advised that in terms of rented accommodation, London Boroughs would be able to make significant savings by offering large incentives to acquire housing stock in close proximity to London and there was evidence that this was happening. There were concerns that there could be increases in child poverty and children living in overcrowded accommodation for longer. Also it was likely that single people on low incomes would be more likely to live in transient, unsettled shared housing and a culture of rough sleeping in could result in Slough.

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The Committee noted the detail of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and a number of ways in which the impact of the benefit changes would be mitigated including the creation of an Empty Homes Strategy. The Officer discussed the practice of other Authorities placing their clients into temporary housing in Slough and the implications of this. It was noted that letters had been sent to the relevant authorities reminding them of their duty to inform Slough BC whenever this happened and to take necessary steps to return the applicant to their own borough.

In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of comments and questions of detail. The Officer confirmed that in relation to the Single Accommodation Rate, there were a number of exceptions to the rule whereby a person under the age of 35 yrs could only claim £73.85 each week and it was agreed that the Officers would forward further details to Committee Members. Members discussed the current position regarding DHP and the Officer advised that the increase in the allocation of money from the previous year would not cover requirements because 286 people under the age of 35 had been affected. It was confirmed that the Dept of work and Pensions would not allocate more money and the Council would have to find any additional funds needed.

The Committee was concerned that other Authorities were repeatedly placing people in emergency private rented accommodation in Slough and appeared not to be adhering to the required procedures. It was agreed that this concern should be addressed by Cabinet.

Resolved-

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That Cabinet be recommended to examine the current position regarding the placement by other Local Authorities of individuals into emergency private rented accommodation within Slough, and the resulting impact on services.

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

None were received.

40. Forward Work Programme

The forward work programme was noted and updated as follows:

- Highway Changes in Chalvey- update report -17th January 2012.
- Procurement of Transactional Services for Slough Borough Council- update report- 6th December, 2011.
- Right to Buy Scheme- 17th January 2012

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41. Attendance Record

Resolved- That the report be noted.

42. Date of Next Meeting- 15th November, 2011

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 15th November, 2011.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.40 pm)