

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 6th December, 2011.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Basharat, Davis, Minhas, O'Connor, Plenty and Smith (arrived at 6.40pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Matloob and Parmar

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Munawar

PART I

54. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

55. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 15th November, 2011

Matters Arising

A Member stated that a request had been made for an update on Speedwell and Employment Services for People with Disabilities and she wanted to know whether employees had found alternative employment. Following discussion with the Director of Community and Wellbeing it was agreed that an update report including specific reference to the outcomes achieved for existing users and operatives of Speedwell would be presented to the Panel in June 2012.

Councillor O'Connor questioned why 'Housing' had not been included as one of the Gold Projects. The Director advised that there were significant changes to housing funding and asked what information was specifically required. The member was concerned about the availability of housing, waiting lists, the provision of emergency accommodation, and the practice of other authorities using Slough to house their homeless. The Director suggested that Neil Aves would present a report to a future meeting on these matters.

The Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that a report on the Health and Wellbeing Board would be presented to the Committee on 2nd February, 2012 in advance of its consideration by Cabinet.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th November, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

56. Member Questions

None received.

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57. Draft Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13 to 2015/16

Julie Evans, Strategic Director of Resources, outlined a report setting out the latest projections of the Council's Revenue and Capital Budgets, for the period 2012/2013 to 2015/16. The report detailed the main assumptions driving the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and set out the proposed strategy for securing savings requirements, whilst maintaining the focus on protection for front line services wherever possible.

The Committee was requested to note the recommendations that would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 12th December, 2011. Members noted the recommended growth and savings options identified to date, a number of key assumptions, and key issues. The Committee noted the impact of savings options on the Council's workforce, and the detail of previously agreed savings and growth. The Director discussed further pressures expected in future years as a result of the proposals currently under consultation, including a 10% reduction in Council Tax Benefit funding. The primary focus of the second phase of the anticipated savings (April 2012) would focus on re-shaping services to deliver the same or greater benefits. It was noted that the projected overall shortfall across the medium term period covered was £17.734m. Previously agreed savings and the savings proposals presented provided opportunities of £11.909m leaving a current deficit across the period of £5.825m. Further opportunities would be explored for consideration by members before the end of calendar year.

The Committee noted that inflation was expected to continue to rise above government expectations and that the remaining substantial funding gap for 2012/13 to 2015/16 would need to be managed. Clearly a significant amount of work would be need to be undertaken to achieve a balanced budget.

Members noted the detail of the Capital Programme and the potential benefits of a Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV). It was noted that 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 Council's general reserves had increased as planned to £6.384m and it was highlighted that drawing on reserves to fund any budget gaps would be a last resort.

The Committee raised a number of questions and comments during debate, including the Re-provision of Supported Living. The Committee was assured that the revised service was on target and Jane Wood, Director of Community and Wellbeing discussed the needs of the service users and the future tender process. It was highlighted that the current service was not competitive on unit price and that half of the current service users were not having their long term needs met in that many who lived in group homes would prefer to live in individual accommodation. A Member queried the position regarding staff who were employed in the Supported Living area and was advised that a small number of staff had expressed an interest in the 'Planning for the Future' scheme. The majority of staff would be TUPE'd across to the new service provider.

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A Member queried whether the Chancellor's 'Autumn Statement' would result in the imposition of more savings and was advised that certainly the situation would not improve and further challenges lay ahead.

It was noted details of the Capital Spending Programme would be presented to a future Committee meeting.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

58. Project Performance and Financial Reporting for 2011/12

Julie Evans, Strategic Director of Resources, outlined a report detailing the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management covering the period up to and including October 2011. The report set out performance against the Council's Gold Projects, the Performance Scorecard, and the Revenue and Capital monitoring position to 31st October, 2011.

Gold Project Update

The Committee was referred to the detailed position on Gold Projects set out within the report. The Director advised that of the ten Gold Projects in total, nine reports had been received and the tenth Gold Project, 'Looked After Children's Placements' was in the initiation phase and the first report would be submitted the following month.

It was highlighted that of the nine gold projects which continued to be active, six had been assessed to have an overall 'Green' status, three 'Amber', and no component of any project had been assessed as having a 'Red' status.

The Committee noted the Performance Scorecard Update and that 'Key People Measures' highlighted that the total number of staff employed by the Council across all directorates had decreased by 302 (or 16%) in the past year. There were 364 vacant posts at the end of September 2011, and the majority of these were within the Education and Children's Services (ECS) Directorate.

The Committee noted Key Volume and Quality Measures and a number of Key Inspection Results in the ECS and CWB Directorates.

Financial Reporting

Members noted that the Council's net revenue budget for 2011/12 was £105.1m and that the Housing Services agreed net operating budget for 2011/12 was a surplus of £87K. There was a forecast under spend for the 2011/12 General Fund at the end of period seven of £335K, being a reduction in net expenditure of £146K since the previous month. For the Housing Revenue Account there was currently a forecast surplus of £171k.

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The Committee noted the detailed month on month movement in variances within all Directorates and the current position regarding the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) where balances were forecast to be £9.702m at year end, being £454k higher than budget and reflecting an improvement of £18,000 in the period.

The Director discussed emerging issues and risks relating to each Directorate and it was highlighted that because the 2011-12 PPRG process was in progress, any identified savings were not reflected in this report. The Committee also noted emerging opportunities within each Directorate.

In the ensuing discussion a member asked what symbols and figures meant in the 'Good is' column within App A on page 43 of the report. It was agreed that the actual figures would be circulated to the Committee.

In response to a further question, Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director, Professional Services, advised that the requested report on Staff Appraisals would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2012.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

59. Human Resources- Update on Temporary Workers

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director (AD), Professional Services, outlined an update report, providing details of numbers, costs and length of tenure of temporary staff by Directorate. The report summarised the rationale and decision making processes that underpinned the current use of temporary staff.

The Committee was advised that Cabinet had recently approved a further restriction on agency/temporary staff as part of the savings drive for the medium term financial strategy. The decision challenged the use of agency staff on a full time basis requiring a full business case to support any appointments over 30 hours per week.

It was highlighted that it was important to be able to deploy staff resources flexibly to meet service peaks and that in some areas of the Council, for example Children's Social Care, national recruitment shortages required the use of temporary staff to manage risks in this area.

The AD advised that overall the number of temporary staff used in the Council had fallen significantly since central monitoring commenced in July 2011, from a total of 199 to 170, being a reduction of 15%.

The Committee noted average employment costs across Directorates and the length of staff tenure in these areas. It was highlighted that in most cases temporary staff would be used for a limited period and members should expect to see an overall reduction in the length of time agency staff were in place in future. Members noted the current position regarding the engagement of temporary staff within each Directorate.

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In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of comments and questions around the use of temporary workers. A Member asked how many temporary staff described themselves as self employed and it was agreed that this information would be provided in the next report.

A Member also commented that the temporary staff bill appeared to be £13m and was therefore not in control. The Director of Resources confirmed that it was nowhere near £13m and details would be provided in the next report. A Member asked how many of the 170 temporary staff would fit into the category of 'staff where it was difficult to recruit by any other means'. It was agreed that this information would be provided in the next report. In response to a Member concern that some staff had been in post for 200 weeks, Jane Wood, Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that this did happen on occasion where it was impossible to directly recruit suitably qualified staff, for example in the area of mental health. It was also sometimes necessary to recruit in this way where the post was covered by time limited Government funding.

A Member requested that information on 'Sessional Workers' be included in the next report on Temporary Workers.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that a further report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

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

Plans to refurbish and refit the CCTV and Careline Control Room

The Committee noted the current position regarding plans to refurbish the Council's CCTV and Careline Control Room within the Town Hall building.

Resolved - That the information report be noted.

Indices of Deprivation in Slough

The Committee noted the comprehensive information briefing report regarding the status of deprivation within Slough, as measured by the Indices of Deprivation 2010. The report compared Slough with other geographic areas and provided a comparison between areas of the Borough.

Whilst some Members found the report informative and presented in an analytical way, the concern was expressed that the report did not give any detail of what the Council was doing to improve matters and it was suggested that this should be addressed in a future report to be included in the main scrutiny agenda.

Resolved - That the information report be noted and a further report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee for scrutiny.

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61. Attendance Record

Resolved - That the report be noted

62. Forward Work Programme

The following items were added to the existing Work Programme:

- Health and Wellbeing Board, 2nd February 2012 (JW/TL)
- Speedwell and Employment Services for People with Disabilities, June 2012 (MB)
- Leisure Strategy, September/October 2012 (Also Neighbourhood Panel) (AS)
- Housing (NA)
- Staff Appraisals- 17th January 2012 (KG)
- Employment of Agency Staff, 17th January, 2012 (KG)
- Capital Spending Programme- Autumn 2012(JE)
- Indices of Deprivation in Slough, 17th January, 2012 (RB)
- Procurement Practices (review of arrangements following recommendations by District Auditor within the Annual Audit Letter 2010/11 considered by Council. (JE)

Teresa Clark, Senior Democratic Services Officer, advised that there were now a significant number of items (more than 10) on the Programme for the January, 2012 meeting and suggested that the Committee review these. The Committee had agreed earlier in the year that the number of papers and subject matters considered at each meeting be reduced to 3 or 4 at most. (This was in line with best practice and to ensure that focused consideration be given to each item.)

Members asked whether an additional meeting could be created in January to accommodate all of the items (or the items be spread over the following meetings). It was agreed that this would be discussed with the Scrutiny Officer and the Chair.

63. Date of Next Meeting- 17th January, 2012

Resolved - That the date of the next meeting be noted.

64. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved - That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item in Part II of the Agenda, as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (amended).

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PART II

(The following is a summary of the matter considered in Part II of the meeting.)

65. Transactional Services- Award of Contract-Presentation

Roger Parkin, Director of Customer & Transactional Services, outlined a presentation detailing the current position regarding the award of the contract for the Transactional Service Centre. The Committee was advised that two Bidders had been invited to participate in the Invitation to Submit a Final Tender and Cabinet would be recommended at its meeting on 12th December, 2011, to endorse the appointment of one of the companies as the preferred supplier for the provision of the Thames Valley Transactional Services Centre.

Resolved - That the current position regarding the award of the Transactional Services Centre be noted.

Chair

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