

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 17th January, 2012.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Parmar

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Minhas and Smith

PART I

66. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

67. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 6th December, 2012

The minutes of the last meeting held on 6th December, 2011 were approved as a correct record.

68. Member Questions

None received.

69. Project, Performance and Financial Reporting 2011/12

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director (AD), Professional Services, introduced a report setting out the Council's overall performance covering the period up to and including November, 2011.

Gold Projects

The AD summarised the position regarding the Council's Ten Gold projects. It was highlighted that 7 of the projects had been assessed as having an overall green status, and 3 had an amber status. None of the projects had been assessed as having a red status.

The AD responded to a number of Member questions including those relating to the delivery of the personalisation project where Members questioned the support available and the continuity of care. The Committee was advised that the project and its scope had been enlarged. The AD advised that an update on the figures would be provided in the next gold project report.

In regard to the Family Placement Service, a Member noted that a number of agency staff had been recruited and ask whether these would eventually be replaced by full time staff. The AD advised that it had been essential to recruit staff Members as soon as possible because the project was time limited. It was agreed however that a full response to this question would be circulated

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to Members. Members asked a number of further questions regarding the new public health transition programme and how funds would be clawed back. Members were advised that the final position would not be known until the end of February.

In response to questions regarding the Safeguarding Improvement Board, the AD advised that the report contained within the agenda was created early in December and a number of issues were still in the process of being sorted. The Committee was advised that a meeting of the Improvement Board had been held in the previous week and there was still a lot of work to be carried out over the ensuing 12 months. Members were advised that the Director of Education and Children's Services (ECS) would bring an update report to the ECS Scrutiny Panel. Members also queried the position regarding school places in Slough and were advised that the ECS Panel had considered this issue in detail and details of the findings would be provided for Committee Members. In response to the question as to whether more schools could be provided in popular catchment areas, where a preference had been made for a school place, the Chief Executive advised that it would be very difficult to always meet a particular preference. It was agreed that the Council's policy regarding the issue of choice of school place be circulated to Committee Members.

Performance Update

The AD summarised the update on the Council's performance indicators at 30th November, 2011, with reference to key people, key volume, and key quality measures. The Committee also noted the detail of the key inspection results and outcome measures.

The AD referred Members to the statistics regarding the use of temporary staff and highlighted that the figures in the report were the 'median average'. The AD advised that overall the picture regarding the use of temporary staff was improving. In the ensuing debate Members questioned whether agencies received a substantial mark up and the AD advised that measures were in place to review and improve this. A Member suggested that this area had not been explored and should be reviewed by the Employment and Appeals Committee or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that this subject would be considered by the Employment and Appeals Committee at its next meeting and that the outcome of this would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee was referred to a tabled document which set out a summary analysis of appraisals held in the year to 16th January, 2012. It was highlighted that figures for the Resources and Regeneration directorate were not available due to data cleansing issues. The Committee noted that the current percentage of staff who had received an appraisal in the 12 months to 16th January, 2012 was 58.2% and this compared favourably to the position in the 12 months proceeding the 26th October, 2011 report when the percentage was 33.8%. The AD suggested and it was agreed that an update on the

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appraisal and other workforce data including vacancies and use of temporary staff to be provided within the performance report on a quarterly basis.

In the ensuing debate a Member asked whether the figures for appraisals included those carried out for temporary staff Members. The AD confirmed that the figures produced by Human Resources did not apply to temporary staff but it was expected that their managers were taking the necessary steps to appraise these individuals. It was agreed that a report on this matter be considered at the next meeting of the Committee. Members were reassured that temporary staff would have a meeting with a senior staff Member to discuss their performance and it was highlighted that whenever performance was not satisfactory that the contract of employment could be brought to an end very quickly. It was agreed that a detailed report on the appraisal system for temporary staff including sessional staff be considered by the Committee at its next meeting.

Financial Reporting

Emma Foy, Interim Head of Central Finance, outlined a finance report and advised that the Council's net revenue budget for 2011/12 was £105.1m and the Housing Services agreed net operating budget for this period was a surplus of £87k. The current forecast under spend for the 2011/12 general fund at the end of period 8 was £1.323m being a net reduction in expenditure of £968k since the previous month. There was currently a forecast under spend of £116k for the Housing Revenue account. The Committee noted the month on month movement in variances within each directorate and the Members were referred to the urgent issues and risks in the relevant period. The Officer also discussed emerging opportunities, staffing budgets and the capital monitoring position.

Members asked a number of questions in the ensuing debate regarding the situation should more schools become academies and the taking on of school finance staff by Arvato. The Committee also discussed the possibility that the local government grant could be cut in future and the future position regarding calculations being attributable to local business rates.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

70. Effect of the Economic Downturn on Slough

Shabnam Ali, Economic Development Policy Officer, introduced an update report regarding the effect of the economic downturn in Slough which had been requested by the Committee at its meeting on 7th June, 2011. Members noted the position regarding unemployment support, the statistics on qualifications and activity on the area of new business. The Officer also discussed the position regarding the Slough property market and the establishment of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The Committee noted that a draft economic development plan was in place,

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informed by the local economic assessment and the plan would be finalised soon and distributed to partners.

Members raised a number of comments and questions in the ensuing debate including the concern that there was a lack of training for middle aged jobless individuals also the number of unemployed in the under 25 age group was of concern. The Chief Executive advised that Slough still had a strong economy and the Council was providing support and improving partnership arrangements to encourage local businesses to employ people from the Slough area. It was accepted that the current circumstances were challenging but short, medium and long term plans were in place to address issues. It was confirmed that Slough's unemployment rate was usually higher than other Berkshire authorities but this was even more the case with the under 25 age group. The Committee was advised that whenever a company reduced the numbers in its workforce the Council could act as a broker between companies to assist with the transfer of jobs from one company to another.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that an update be provided in June 2012.

71. Government Proposals on the Council House Right to Buy Scheme and its effect on Slough

Ken Hopkins, Interim Head of Housing Management, outlined a report setting out the Government's latest position on the Right to Buy (RTB) Scheme for social housing and the effect that this could have on Slough Borough Council. The Committee was reminded that in the previous year the government had announced its intention to change the rules regarding the current RTB scheme to stimulate sales and a related consultation was being held up to the period ending 2nd February, 2012. The Officer highlighted that the most publicised aspect of the change proposed was the move to a single national discount cap of £50k. Members noted the treatment of the capital receipts from of the current RTB scheme whereby after accounting for liable costs, 75% of the net receipt was paid to Central Government. The proposed arrangements made significant changes to this to enable the commitment to a one for one replacement of units sold. The financial and practical difficulties of this aspiration were discussed by the Officer and it was highlighted that Councils could not procure the housing replacement on a one off one for one basis. The Officer concluded that many unknowns remained within the proposals to make any firm predictions of how the changes would affect Slough directly but the Government had a firm intention to implement the changes in April 2012.

In the ensuing debate Members expressed great concern regarding the Council's inability to rebuild further Council housing and the vast numbers of individuals on its housing waiting list. The Committee requested that Neil

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Aves, Assistant Director, Housing Services reflect the Committee's concerns within his response to the consultation document.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that Assistant Director, Housing Services, reflect the Committees concerns within his consultation response.

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

The Committee noted the content of two reports on the Local Strategic Partnership and Partnership Governance and Highway Changes in Chalvey. A Member requested details on the costs of the current road trials in Chalvey and it was agreed that the information would be forwarded by the relevant Officer to the Member.

Resolved – That the information reports be noted.

73. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the report be noted.

74. Forward Work Programme

It was confirmed that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 2nd February, 2012 had been cancelled and the meeting would now be held on 13th February, 2012.

The Committee reviewed its work programme and amendments were made as follows:

- Housing (Neil Aves) – availability, waiting lists and emergency housing process – the report would be considered at the meeting on 10th April, 2012 and not in March.
- Indices of Deprivation – with reference to the Foxborough Ward 10th April, 2012.

75. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday, 13th February.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.37 pm and closed at 8.23 pm)