

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 10th April, 2012.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Minhas and Plenty

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Basharat, Davis, Haines, O'Connor and Smith

PART I

98. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

99. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th February 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th February, 2012 were approved as a correct record.

100. Minutes of the last Meeting held on 6th March, 2012

The minutes of the last meeting held on 6th March, 2012 were approved as a correct record.

101. Change to Order of Agenda

The Chair advised that the order of agenda would be amended so that the item on the Localism Act 2011 would be taken first.

102. Member Questions

None received.

103. Localism Act 2011

Tracy Luck, Head of Strategy Policy and Communications, introduced a report on the Localism Act 2011 and provided an update on the progress made in implementing required actions.

The Officer discussed the relationship between the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The Committee noted the implications for a number of areas, including governance, pay policy, the community right to challenge and various planning matters.

The Committee noted that the government would publish a full implementation timetable in the near future but it was expected that the majority of the key elements in the Act would come into force in 2012. It was highlighted that the Corporate Management Team had already identified a number of key policy areas for initial examination and lead Officers had been identified.

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The Committee was advised by Officers in attendance that the Act incorporated significant changes to the Business Rate and Council Tax system, and modelling had already started on this. Members were also advised that where a Neighbourhood Forum was established it would be allowed to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan. It was also highlighted that the Act made provision for Neighbourhood Development Orders to allow communities to approve development without requiring normal planning consent. The introduction of Community Right to Build orders would empower local communities to take forward developments in their area without the need to apply for planning permission where there was overwhelming local support for development (subject to certain conditions). The Committee was advised that a report on these issues would be submitted to the Planning Committee.

In the ensuing debate a Member questioned the extent to which the information in the report had been made available to other Members. It was confirmed that the report had been published and that the Committee may wish to bring particular aspects of the report back for further scrutiny. A Member suggested that it would be helpful if a timeline of events setting out stages of the Localism Act were submitted to the Committee and it was agreed that a briefing for members would be arranged incorporating the respective timelines. The Committee also requested that a report on the planning aspects of the Act be referred to the Committee prior to consideration by Planning Committee. A Member also requested that the new housing allocations policy being developed for adoption by Cabinet in the coming months be considered by the Committee at a future meeting. It was agreed that this would be referred to the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved -

- (a) That the current position be noted and a briefing be arranged for the Committee detailing the timelines of the Localism Act.
- (b) That a report on the planning aspects of the Act be referred to the Committee prior to consideration by the Planning Committee.
- (c) That the Committee consider the new housing allocations policy prior to its adoption by Cabinet.

104. Project, Performance and Financial Reporting for 2011/12

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director (AD), Professional Services, introduced a report setting out the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management covering the period up to and including February 2012. It was highlighted that due to financial and performance end of year close down, the next finance and performance report would be made at the start of the new municipal year at the Committee meeting scheduled on 31st May, 2012. The AD referred the Committee to the Gold Project update and the performance scorecard set out in the report. It was highlighted that the

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reported average sickness rate for the quarter was slightly down on average for the same period in the previous year and that lower salary bands had reported higher rates of sickness absence. It was also highlighted that the Council's new website had been launched recently and public response would be monitored.

The AD also discussed the increased demand in Children's Social Care services and that the number of looked after children in the care of the authority remained higher than historic figures. Adult Social Care faced similar increases in demand and between April 2011 and February 2012 there had been 187 adult safeguarding referrals requiring a strategy meeting to be convened. Members noted that the Council's adoption service was inspected by Ofsted in February 2012 and it had been confirmed that SBC provided a good service and outstanding performance in helping children to achieve well and make a positive contribution.

In the ensuing debate members raised a number of questions and comments. The AD was asked to provide details of the reasons for sickness absence and it was suggested that this be examined in a report to the Employment and Appeals Committee. In response to a question regarding the Red status for the Business Continuity Gold Project, Gillian Ralphs, Assistant Director, advised that there had been difficulties around the resources available to support the project and delays due to the need on occasions to cancel meetings. She confirmed that the final report was nearing completion.

Emma Foy, Interim Head of Central Finance, referred the Committee to the financial reporting section of the report. The 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 Committee noted that there was currently a forecast underspend for the 2011/12 General Fund at the end of period 11 of £1.656m after the agreement of budget carry forward. For the Housing Revenue account there was currently a forecast underspend £161K. It was highlighted that the Customer and Transactional Services contract awarded to Arvato had now gone live.

Resolved - That the Council's Gold Project, Performance Scorecard, and Revenue and Capital monitoring position to 29th February, 2012 be noted.

105. Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/2012

Sarah Forsyth, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/12 which would be presented to Council on 24th April, 2012. The Committee considered the draft report and confirmed that no amendments or additions were necessary.

Resolved - That the Committee endorsed the Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/12.

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

Art at the Centre - Post Implementation Review

The Committee noted the contents of a report regarding the Art at the Centre, High Street, Enhancement Scheme.

Gillian Ralphs, Assistant Director, Enforcement and Regulatory Services, advised that there were grants to install a new art feature into the existing lamplight structure situated at the western entrance of the pedestrianised High Street, Slough. Members views were sought on the design of the model and it was agreed that views would be sought through an item in the Members' bulletin and the opportunity to view a model of the display.

Resolved - That the information report be noted.

107. Forward Work Programme

Resolved - That the report be noted and that the programme be updated as follows:

- Localism Act- Planning aspects of the Act be referred to the Committee prior to consideration by the Planning Committee.
- Localism Act- New housing allocations policy to be considered by the Committee prior to its adoption by Cabinet.

108. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the report be noted.

109. Date of Next Meeting- 31st May, 2012

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 31st May, 2012.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.35 pm and closed at 7.40 pm)