

Health Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 13th October, 2011.

Present:- Councillors P K Mann (Chair), Chohan, Davis, Long, Munawar, Plimmer, Rasib, Sharif and Strutton

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Haines

PART I

94. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

95. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 20th September, 2011

The minutes of the last meeting held on 20th September, 2011, were approved as a correct record.

96. Employment Support for People with Disabilities

Mike Bibby, Assistant Director (AD), Personalisation, Commissioning and Partnerships, referred the Panel to the report set out in the agenda summarising the key issues regarding the future of employment support for people with disabilities. The report had been considered by the Health Scrutiny Panel on 20th September, 2011 but on that occasion the Panel determined that it would defer making any recommendations to Cabinet until the Panel had visited the Speedwell Enterprise site. The Panel was reminded that the Special meeting had been convened so that the Panel could further consider the option and recommendations being considered by Cabinet on 17th October 2011 and determine any recommendations that the Panel may wish to make. The AD thanked members for attending the site visit and it was felt that this had been useful. Speedwell Enterprise staff were also thanked for accommodating members of the Panel. The Panel was advised that members of Cabinet had also visited the site.

The AD discussed the background and context of the report, the related cost of the current provision for employment support for disabled adult social care service users and the findings of the national policy review, 'Getting in, staying in and getting on – disability employment support fit for the future'.

The Panel was reminded of the five options which had been considered for future service delivery and that the preferred option was one which would be broadly based on the current work opportunities service model.

Panel members raised a number of issues / comments in the ensuing debate. The establishment of a disability working forum was discussed and the limitations of the current scheme in the sense that it provided a limited number of places. The AD confirmed that the work Choice scheme would provide short-term work availability but this concept advocated a scheme of progression and was not meant for long term provision. In response to a

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question regarding the availability of places for Slough residents, the AD confirmed that this information was not collated but the scheme was available to disabled people who resided in Slough and other areas. The Panel was advised that the majority of individuals who had left Speedwell and subsequently gained employment elsewhere had maintained their new position. In response to the concern that there were insufficient long-term employment offers in place for Speedwell Operators, the AD advised that five members had received work experience at Slough Borough Council. This had not led to permanent employment but that was not the sole aim of work experience. A Member questioned why a contract for £150k that had been offered to Speedwell was not pursued. The AD advised that he had discussed this with workshop staff, but there had been questions around the viability of the contract and its long-term conditions. A business case and plan had been requested to explore the viability of the possible contract, but this had not materialised.

The Panel was advised that the Council would provide substantial support for the operatives and ensure that they would be able to continue to meet their former colleagues. In response to comments that the current Speedwell provision was a great success and did not cost a great deal to provide, the AD advised that the issue under discussion was not about money but rather the provision of a suitable service model for the future which could benefit more individuals in the community who are eligible for Adult Social Care services. The national review had stated that a desired aim was to overcome social exclusion and the current model clearly provided a service that was segregated from the main community. The proposed new model would seek to promote integration in open employment settings. In response to a comment that it would be possible to find companies who would provide work for the current operatives, the AD emphasised that the issue was not about costs or savings but about providing a suitable service model. The Panel was advised that work would be carried out to assist the operatives to find employment and if this was not possible then measures would be put in place to ensure that meaningful activities were provided. It was highlighted that the overall policy should meet the needs of more Slough's residents, specifically those eligible for Adult Social Care services. In response to further questions the AD advised that there were specialist organisations who could deliver the new service model under contractual arrangements and necessary safeguards would be put in place as part of the contract. A Member argued that in the outside world people would have someone to fight for them for example a trade union but this was not the case for the workshop operatives. The AD confirmed that all views had been taken into account and there had been extensive discussion with a number of agencies and trade unions.

Panel Members proposed and discussed a number of suggested recommendations.

It was moved and seconded that the current service and contract remain in force for a period of one year so that other avenues could be explored and the Disability Forum be established. The recommendation was put and lost.

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The following recommendations were proposed, seconded and carried by a majority of votes:

Resolved-

- a) The Panel recognise the contribution that Speedwell Enterprises has made to both the town and its service users, and further recognises that Speedwell is more than a typical factory based employment service.
- b) The Panel is unanimous in its view that disabled people in Slough, and particularly those eligible for Adult Social Care services, should benefit from support into employment, work experience, skills development or volunteering.
- c) The Panel, whilst noting the contribution made by Speedwell, recognises that the current and future needs in Slough call for a revised service, one which is better able to meet and respond to both the volume of need and the specificity of individual cases. As such the Panel recommends a policy shift which sees disabled people being supported into mainstream employment rather than the current model.
- d) The Panel believe that this policy shift will help a greater number of vulnerable people in Slough by ensuring greater access to those that are eligible for Adult Social Care.
- e) The Panel however also recognises the impact that the closure of Speedwell will have, particularly on long-term users of the service, and seeks reassurance from Cabinet over how these users will be guaranteed support into alternative employment or provisions.
- f) The Panel also recognises the social importance and value that users place on Speedwell and also urge the Cabinet to look into ensuring social provisions are maintained and expanded.

97. Date of Next Meeting- 18th October, 2011

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

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)