

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Monday, 8th July, 2013.

Present:- Councillors O'Connor (Chair), Bal, Malik, M S Mann, Minhas, Nazir, Small and Smith (Vice-Chair)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Plimmer and Walsh (arrived at 7.00 pm and left at 7.50 pm)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Hussain

PART I

9. Declaration of Interest

Cllr Bal declared a personal interest as his daughter worked for the Council. Cllr Small declared a personal interest as her son-in-law was an occasional contract driver for the Council.

10. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 4th June 2013

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 4th June 2013 be approved.

11. Member Questions

There were no questions received from Members.

12. Cllr Plimmer Call-in: Leaseholder Annual Service Charge Statements

The Committee considered a report in relation to a call-in submitted by Cllr Plimmer, requesting a review of the process for the issue of the Leaseholders annual service charge statement and arrangements for the collection of service charges. The report set out the reasons for Cllr Plimmer's call-in and he was in attendance to explain his concerns.

The Officer response addressed the main points of the call-in as follows:

- Although there had been a delay in issuing the annual service charge statements, most leaseholders had received their letters on 23/25th February 2013 and had contacted the Revenues/Leasehold team immediately to request monthly payments. The deadline for requesting monthly repayments had been extended from 28th February to 4th March.
- Arvato had now confirmed that it would undertake automatic renewal of monthly repayments/debits from next financial year, the service to be offered to all Leaseholders not under escalated recovery action.
- The service charge bill issued in February each year (for payment in April) contains an estimate based on the expected cost of repairs in the coming year. A breakdown of the service charge could only be given

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after accounts had been closed and statements produced (in October) based on the actual spend and repairs undertaken.

- The Management Fee was calculated at 25% of the total amount billed to leaseholders for variable service charges and property services and therefore increased each year in relation to any increase in those charges. A benchmarking exercise was being carried out on management fees with a view to adopting best practice.

Following questions from Members and supplementary points raised by Cllr Plimmer, the Committee was pleased to note the re-introduction of leaseholder forums on a regular basis, which were an effective and beneficial means of communication. Improvements to the service being worked on included the addition of the leasehold service charge accounts to the housing management system *Capita*, which would allow leaseholders to pay by Direct Debit (which would be automatically renewed each year unless the leaseholder requested otherwise). A project had also commenced on “tenant on-line”, with the aim of giving all residents access to a service for reporting repairs, tracking progress on communal repairs raised on individual blocks etc. Service charges were being reviewed across the Borough and it was planned to reconcile the service charges as well as the service as a whole for both tenants and leaseholders. A number of these improvements were reliant on upgrades to the IT systems in place.

Resolved –

- (a) To note the arrangements for administering the issue of annual service charge statements and the improvements made to the process which should address the issues raised in the call-in.
- (b) To make the following specific comments:
 - That provision of the Interserve interface and implementation of the tenant on-line system and appropriate IT improvements should be a priority system;
 - The rolling continuation of monthly repayments from Leaseholders year on year as now agreed by Arvato be confirmed as standard practice;
 - That investigation of a move to a flat fee management charge rather than a percentage charge in conjunction with implementation of IT improvements information in relation to a breakdown of charges be progressed as a matter of good practice; and
 - A progress report on the improvements to the Leaseholder Service be presented to the Committee in 6 to 12 months time.

13. Childhood Obesity Review

The Committee considered the first report in connection with the childhood obesity review containing information directed towards the question “Does Slough have a problem with childhood obesity?”

Childhood obesity was seen as a global health challenge. In England, the figures for 2011/12 (the latest available) showed that 19.2% of children in

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Year 6 were obese and a further 14.7% were overweight. Of children in Reception (aged 4-5), 9.5% were obese and another 13.1% were overweight. This meant that almost a third of 10-11 year olds and over a fifth of 4-5 year olds were overweight or obese. A breakdown of the figures covering the years 2006/07 through to 2011/12 showed that there was a higher incidence of obesity in Slough (for both age groups) than the national average and compared to other Berkshire Authorities.

The report also contained some ward level data from the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 results. This showed that Colnbrook with Poyle had the highest rates locally of obesity amongst both Reception year and Year 6 pupils.

Dr Angela Snowling, Consultant in Public Health, Dr Buchi Reddy, Public Health Programme Manager, and Laura Brookstein, Slough Schools Sports Network were in attendance at the meeting, spoke to the report and answered questions from Members. Points arising from discussion and answers were (in summary):

- Every child in the Reception year and Year 6 was measured (but not during the years in between) to produce the statistics. It was notable that the Slough obesity rate for Year 6 (although high) had stayed the same in recent years compared with a rising trend elsewhere.
- Important responses to childhood obesity had been introduced through putting in place clear obesity care pathways; a breastfeeding strategy; a weaning strategy; and arranging public health dietician advice into every school.
- The Slough Schools Sports Network had been working to develop school sport on the curriculum and after school sport using funding available from national governing bodies. Recently the focus had turned to younger age children (Key stage 1 and 2).
- There was a perceived problem with lack of space for children for play, sport and general physical activity which was readily accessible, available and secure. Could a map showing the amount and location of open space be provided? (Note: a DVD was available showing progress of the Slough Schools programme suitable for viewing by the Committee at a later date).
- Family based factors contributing to childhood obesity were noted to include: low fruit and vegetable intake in the diet; inadequate cooking skills practiced or learnt in the home; lunch boxes not well balanced; frequent consumption of high energy drinks with high sugar content; poor influence/example from overweight parents.
- While poverty or deprivation could not be cited as a cause of obesity, there was often found to be a link.
- More detail could be provided to a future meeting about the early years provision/initiatives eg the service commissioned to improve breastfeeding rates. It would also be useful for the Committee to study existing programmes showing positive results eg Montem School initiatives, and results from GP surgeries, health visitor checks etc.
- Comparison of statistics with other areas in Berkshire was not considered to be most helpful but there could be lessons to be learnt from Reading, which was probably the most comparable other

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authority in the county, and also London Boroughs with a similar profile to Slough. (The London Borough of Waltham Forest was known to have a policy restricting the opening of fast food outlets in the vicinity of schools which was the sort of initiative to taken into account in the review).

- With regard to ward figures on obesity, it was suggested the Committee should look further into the reasons behind why Colnbrook with Poyle, for instance, appeared to a bigger problem.
- What information was there about school breakfast clubs, the cost and any measures of success. Was there any evidence to link the take up of free school meals with obesity?

Resolved – That the information provided in the initial report and arising from the discussion at the meeting be drawn on to:

- (a) provide data outlining levels of childhood obesity, current trends and influencing factors; and
- (b) map out a number of issues to be explored in more detail at future meetings which were lined up to consider in turn the physical environment; the role of GPs and Primary Care; the role of schools; and the encouragement of greater physical activity.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the current work programme for the Committee for the 2013/14 year. It was noted that a number of un-programmed items had yet to be timetabled but the intention was to set no more than three or four main topics for review at each meeting.

Resolved – That the current work programme be noted.

15. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the Members' attendance record be noted.

16. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10th September 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.02 pm)