

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 8th April, 2014.

Present:- Councillors O'Connor (Chair), Bal, Davis, Hussain, Malik, M S Mann, Minhas (until 8pm) and Nazir (arrived 6.35pm)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Smith

PART I

82. Declaration of Interest

Councillor Bal declared a personal interest in that a member of his family was employed by Slough Borough Council.

83. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 4th March 2014

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 4th March 2014 be approved as a correct record.

84. Member Questions

There were no questions received from Members.

85. Corporate Plan 2014/15

Details of the Corporate Plan for 2014/15 were summarised. Members were informed that the plan had been re-designed to be accessible to residents, partners and staff and that it would provide a framework for future engagement activity.

In response to what the key challenges and risk areas were for the Authority, it was highlighted that following the recent Ofsted inspection, improving Children's Social Care was a key priority. Other priorities included delivering the budget for 2014/15 and identifying further required savings and implementing Fit for the Future to ensure that all staff have the skills to meet the challenges ahead.

A number of points were raised in the ensuing discussion, which included:

- What measures were in place to increase the number of older people who achieved independence through rehabilitation or enablement or other types of non-residential or short term care. It was noted that the Health Scrutiny Panel were examining this issue as part of the Transformation Programme and a progress report would be submitted to Members in due course.
- A query was raised regarding the housing priority of building more than 200 new affordable homes for local residents - specifically where these new homes would be built and the number of which would be allocated to key workers. Members were informed that a number of sites had

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been identified to meet the housing target which included the former town hall site and Kennedy Park. It was noted that the Employment and Appeals Committee would examine in detail the number of homes to be allocated for key workers. Members welcomed a suggestion that the Housing Service Plan include details of allocation of houses for key workers.

- A Member referred to the recent Ofsted Inspection regarding Children's Social Care and proposed that a stronger emphasis be placed on constructively engaging with partners and prioritising highly any referrals made.

Resolved – That the Corporate Plan 2014/15 be noted and submitted to Cabinet with the following amendment:-

Page 18 – children's social care to read:

“Encourage partners to improve frontline inter-agency working and communication in order to risk assess and prioritise highly all referrals about children at risk in order to keep them safe.”

86. Transactional Services Partnership Update

Peter Schriewersmann, arvato Site Director outlined details of the progress made in Year 2 of the Thames Valley Transactional Service Centre Partnership for the period April 2013 to March 2014. Members were informed that the partnership between arvato and Slough Borough Council (SBC) continued to develop and work towards achieving the ambitions of SBC. Key areas of priority were highlighted as:

- Creating new income streams that would be shared with SBC by attracting new public sector work
- Adding value to the partnership by focusing on the young and unemployed by recruiting apprentices, offering NVQ qualifications and employment.
- Introducing a recruitment strategy to specifically target the unemployed in the borough with a focus on young people and on part-time jobs.
- Supporting sustainable SME businesses to deliver more jobs for Slough residents by setting up an advisory service providing advice on topics relating to arvato's core business.

Specific actions taken to date included:

- The recent relocation of arvato UK and Ireland to Slough which would bring additional business to the borough.
- The creation of a specific schools package to attract businesses from educational facilities such as schools and universities.
- The recruitment to the Neighbourhood Benefits Officers, which would assist the Housing Service both in terms of housing benefit applications and ensuring the maximisation of benefit take up in the borough by providing a more local accessible and tailored service.
- Increasing income to the Council via Council Tax and Business Rates.

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Details of arvato's performance to date were outlined as:

Business Rates – collection figures for the end of February 2014 were 95.2%. A considerable amount of work had been undertaken by arvato to ensure accuracy of the business rates database including serving completion notices and reviewing all mandatory and discretionary reliefs. It was noted that the successful appointment of an Inspector within the service would further enhance the provision of the service.

Council Tax Collection – Members were reminded that council tax collection had been impacted by significant legislative change. CIPFA's estimate of the impact of the legislative change was evaluated at a reduction in council tax collection of approximately 1.19%. It was noted that the council tax collection rate in 2012/13 was 95.3% and that the achievement figure for 2013/14 was 94.8% and that this was 0.69% better than could have been expected.

Housing Benefits – Committee Members were informed that housing benefit claims were being processed within the target set of twenty days.

Future service improvements were outlined and included the restructure of the Revenue and Benefits service and further improvements to Customer Service.

A number of points were raised in the ensuing discussion, which included:

- *Apprenticeship schemes*. In September 2012 arvato launched an apprenticeship scheme in partnership with SBC. To date eleven apprentices were enrolled on the scheme and although there was no guarantee of a job at the end of the apprenticeship, the trainees could apply for a position should an employment opportunity arise within arvato. It was noted that the minimum target of 117 apprenticeship schemes being offered for the duration of the arvato contract would be exceeded.
- *Key Performance Indicators (KPI)*. Responding to who set the Key performance Indicators to monitor service delivery from arvato, Members were informed that SBC in conjunction with arvato set targets, to ensure that they were realistic and achievable. It was noted that external scrutiny was also carried out by the Council's auditors.
- *ICT*. Concern was raised that improvements in ICT had not been made. Members were reminded that many of the delivery elements within the ICT strategy were now the responsibility of arvato. It was noted that a comprehensive collection of KPI's had been identified for Phase 2.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mr Schriewersmann for a comprehensive presentation.

Resolved – That details of the presentation be noted.

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(Councillor Minhas left the meeting)

87. Estate Services Review - Update on Improvements

Members were reminded that the Committee at its meeting in July 2013 had considered a report in response to a member call in relation to concerns raised about areas of the leasehold service. Committee Members were provided with details of progress made on improvements to the Leasehold Service and specifically with regard to the points raised at the July meeting as follows:

- *That provision of the Interserve interface and other appropriate IT improvements should be a priority to enable the introduction of the tenant on-line system:* Although Interserve were currently working on the introduction of a new repairs management system, the partnering contract was due for renewal during 2015 which would delay the development of the Tenant Online Services.
- *The rolling continuation of monthly repayments from leaseholders year on year as now agreed by Arvato to be confirmed as standard practice:* this action had been completed.
- *A flat fee management charge rather than a percentage charge:* a review of the management fee and benchmarking exercise with other providers through the Leasehold Excellence Network were underway. Once the management fee had been decided a report would be presented to Cabinet for approval.

Members discussed the processes and procedures involved regarding the procurement process relating to leaseholder services. It was explained that the Property Services Department were responsible for the letting of contracts. Members expressed their concerns in ensuring that leaseholders were provided with value for money and stated that where possible, contracts should be given to local businesses. It was agreed that officers involved in the procurement and contracts process for leaseholder services be invited to a future meeting to discuss further the processes involved in the tendering of contracts and delivery of the relevant services.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Director for Customer and Community Services, Assistant Director for Housing and Environment and Assistant Director for Commissioning and Procurement be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the procurement and contracts process.

88. Annual Scrutiny Report 2013/14

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Annual Scrutiny Report 2013/14 to Members for their consideration. The work of the Committee, together with that of the Scrutiny Panels was outlined along with the challenges faced and

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improvements made as a result of scrutiny. In particular, the Childhood Obesity Review undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was highlighted where a number of recommendations were made to Cabinet.

Members were reminded that the production of an annual report was a statutory requirement which would require endorsement from full Council.

Recommendation to Council – That the Annual Scrutiny Report 2013/14 be endorsed.

89. Loanshark Service - A Partnership Initiative

Members noted details of the work carried out by the Trading Standards Service in relation to Loan Sharks and the measures that were being implemented to tackle illegal money lending across the Borough. The Trading Standards team were supported in their local 'loan shark' work by an agreed protocol with the Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT), which was hosted by Birmingham City Council and funded by Central Government, to provide a specialist task force designed to tackle illegal money lending across regional boundaries.

Following discussions with key partner agencies it was agreed that events to raise awareness of loan sharks would be rolled out in the Britwell and Chalvey areas as both had high levels of deprivation; with many residents who were financially vulnerable being either unemployed, young single parents or families on low income. Initiatives included:

- Over 700 flyers were distributed - via newsletters for taxi drivers, article to elderly members through Age Concern and flyers included in food bags given out by Slough Food Bank
- Free awareness training was provided by the IMLT.
- Credit Union gave advice and opened accounts at Land Mark Place. 27 new accounts opened with the Credit Union.
- Leaflets delivered to over 640 households.
- Press release in Slough observer and radio interview aired on local radio station.

Members noted that loan shark initiatives would continue to be delivered by the Trading Standards Team during 2014 as well as gathering intelligence on illegal activity.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

90. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the Member's attendance record be noted.

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91. Vote of Thanks

The Chair thanked Committee Members and Officers for their support and input to the Committee during the past municipal year.

Councillor Bal, on behalf of Committee Members, thanked the Chair and wished her well for the future.

92. Date of Next Meeting - 17th June 2014

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 17th June 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm)