

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 20th January, 2016.**

**Present:-** Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bains (from 6.56pm), N Holledge, Malik, Rana and Usmani

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Ajaib and Bal

### **PART I**

#### **40. Declaration of Interest**

None were received.

#### **41. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 12 November 2015**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 be approved as a correct record.

#### **42. Member Questions**

None were received.

#### **43. Burnham Station Traffic Scheme - 3 Month Analysis**

Savio DeCruz, Acting Head of Transport, introduced a report summarising the Burnham Station Traffic Scheme experimental order, setting out the scheme's progress and reception after 3 months.

It was confirmed that Burnham Station was located in an area that experienced high congestion at peak times of the morning and afternoon. Following requests from residents and local community groups to improve traffic flow and commuter parking in the area, the Council had implemented a strategic re-routing of traffic to relieve certain road corridors of high congestion.

In November 2014, the Council submitted two bids as part of the Local Growth Fund 2 (LGF2) to the LEP for improvements to Burnham Station and Langley Station. The bids focussed on improving accessibility to the stations (including the road layout) and constructing new buildings on the station forecourt. The bids were given programme entry subject to the Local Transport Body (LTB) financial approval process, however in order to receive full approval, a business case compliant with the Department for Transport (DfT) criteria needed to be met.

To meet the DfT criteria, transport modelling was commissioned by officers in 2014 to assess 12 different scenarios. The report found that all options would result in an improvement around the station but would also have some impact on other local roads.

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Officers set up a working group consisting of Network Rail, Crossrail, Rail for London, First Great Western and Segro to discuss the options and the outputs from the assessment and to also understand how the area including the station could be improved. The working group collectively agreed that if Station Road could be closed, then this would help realise wider benefits including regeneration of the sites surrounding the station.

Members agreed to proceed with the scheme option involving the full closure of Station Road, in order to trial the 'worst case scenario' of the options available, as part of an experimental order. The experimental scheme began on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October. The procedure for consultation as part of an experimental traffic order required that the consultation begin once the scheme was operational. The consultation therefore began on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

The consultation sought feedback through various means of communication, including the leafletting of residents, email correspondence, an online survey (via Survey Monkey), press releases, and social media. Businesses were contacted via the Segro e-newsletter, whilst additional stakeholders (such as First Berkshire Bus Company), and local schools were contacted to provide feedback. An open letter, signed by approximately 900 people, was received.

A breakdown of the feedback received was set out in the report, and included data from the aforementioned sources as well as additional data from Automatic Traffic Counts (ATCs), and journey time surveys. General feedback received showed that the vast majority of people contacting the Council via email or via the online survey were against the scheme in general, citing longer journey times and an increase in traffic congestion. The open letter received requested the immediate reinstatement of Station Road to vehicular traffic, in a northbound direction. Stakeholder feedback was predominantly negative, citing longer journey times, and a loss of trade.

Journey time data from key routes showed that majority of journeys took longer than before the experimental order was implemented. Average traffic speed on key routes had remained largely the same as previously, or had seen slight decreases.

A number of questions were asked and responses received. Comments were made regarding financial losses incurred by local businesses and difficulties encountered by wheelchair bound individuals in accessing buses. Mr DeCruz stated that the Council had not been notified of accessibility issues from either the local bus company or residents. Furthermore, no correspondence was received from local businesses regarding a loss of revenue.

A Member requested details as to the total cost of the experimental scheme to date. It was noted that Members would be informed of the total final cost following the submission of all outstanding invoices.

A Member stated that communication with the local community, including both residents and local businesses was vital to ensure an open and transparent

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process. It was noted that in addition to surveys to receive feedback, a Transport for Slough Facebook page had been established.

Responding to what support was provided to schools within the vicinity of the area, following the implementation of the experimental scheme, it was explained that officers had engaged with schools in providing information relating to sustainable traffic schemes, cycle initiatives and promoting active travel to school plans.

Members were advised that taking into account the responses received during the consultation period, the Council had decided to amend the experimental order to implement a one way northbound system. It was anticipated that the one way system would take effect from late February 2016. It was confirmed that a further survey would be commissioned to gauge public opinion following the initiation of the one way system.

**Resolved** – That the feedback and data gathered be noted.

### **44. Thames Valley Transactional Service Centre April 2015 - November 2015**

Members considered details of the Thames Valley Transactional Service Centre progress report for the period April to November 2015.

Julian Rice, arvato Site Director outlined details of the report. Performance for all services in scope for the first three quarters continued to be on track for a positive outturn, despite a weaker than expected start to the commencement of Contract Year 4 in April 2015. Key collection targets were positively on track to exceed 14/15's record performance whilst significant investment had been made by the Council in the IT estate which would provide considerable benefits for both staff and residents.

In addition to the Contract deliverables arvato continued to support, lead and engage on a number of key strategic projects. These included the set up of Slough Children Services Trust, the implementation of the Council's new ERP platform coupled with the extensive Accommodation Strategy for the Council.

Logistics, Transactional Finance and Transactional HR all continued to demonstrate particularly strong performance with the consistently high levels of efficiency. Key Performance Indicators relating to these service areas were highlighted. It was highlighted that the Council's decision to replace its financial system had resulted in combining finance, procurement, human resources and payroll functions by integrating business processes and utilising a single database for multiple purposes across the Council. This would enable a simple and accurate manner of reporting across the whole organisation, contributing to initiation efficiencies and serving as a platform for later transformation to drive further savings.

Supporting the community remained a key strategic aim for arvato. Sponsoring the Slough Business Awards continued to support the Council's campaign to improve Slough's reputation as a place to live and do business.

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A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion, including:

- *Number of apprenticeships and destination of leavers.* It was noted that at this stage in the partnership, the target was to have recruited 27 apprentices. Following the addition of 11 apprentices in September, the total number was currently 30 and arvato were on track to exceed their contractual obligation of employing 117 apprentices during the life of the contract. It was agreed that future reports would include details relating to whether apprentices continued to be employed by arvato following the end of their apprenticeship scheme.
- *Clarification regarding KPI statistics.* Responding to monthly discrepancies within the KPI statistics provided, it was explained that the KPI targets defined within the report were annual targets and that there were inevitable peaks and troughs in service demand throughout the year. It was noted that the next committee report would include the annual KPI figures. Members were informed that the current KPI targets were in the process of being reviewed and agreed for the 2016/17 financial year and that these would also be included in the July Committee report.
- *Aged Debt.* A Member requested details regarding the amount of monies that were owed and the time period that was being considered. It was explained that an amount of £10.9 million over a ten year period was being examined.
- *Profit Sharing Mechanism.* It was brought to Members attention that arvato had had a number of meetings with Councils looking at outsourcing as part of their future delivery model and were currently engaged in the bidding process for a number of local authority contracts. Following a number of Member questions and responses, it was agreed that details in relation to the profit sharing mechanism within the contract between the Council and arvato would be detailed in the July Committee report.
- *Customer Service feedback.* Details were sought regarding customer feedback. The Committee were informed that a survey had been carried out in the revenue/benefits section regarding customer satisfaction, the findings which would be reported to the July Committee meeting.
- Members congratulated arvato for having successfully collected an additional £2 million in business rates on behalf of the Council.

**Resolved** – That the progress made within the period April 2015 to November 2015 be noted.

### 45. Council Houses Rents and Charges

Neale Cooper, Corporate Finance Business Partner, outlined a report, presenting changes in the Housing rents and service charges for 2016/17. The report set out the context and implications for the Council over the setting of housing rents and service charges for the next four years and the likely impact on the local community. The report was presented to Cabinet on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

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The Committee was requested to scrutinise and comment on aspects of the report which would be considered by the Council at its meeting on 26th January 2016.

The Officer advised that in the ten years prior to 2015/16, the setting of Council social rents had been guided by the government policy known as 'rent convergence', the intention of which was to bring parity to council social rents across the country, and reduce the 'gap' between council social rents and Housing Association rents. Members noted that a government prescribed formula drove these changes and linked the following year's rent changes to the previous September's RPI; weighted for regional differences e.g. salaries and house prices.

It was noted that in May 2014, the Department for Local Communities and Government had issued a document which laid out the Government's policy on social rents for the ten year period from 2015/16 for stock-owning local authorities. Under the changed rent policy, from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, rent convergence was to be discontinued and rents were to increase by no more than CPI + 1% for 2015/16 to 2024/25. Subsequently in the summer budget on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the Chancellor announced that "rents paid in the social housing sector would not be frozen, but reduced by 1% a year for the next four years". In previous years, the Government had always allowed Councils discretion in changing their rents but produced a rent policy to guide Councils in the setting of their rents. Slough BC had followed Government rent policy and set its rents accordingly.

The Committee was advised that the Government had now departed from the previous practice of issuing rent 'guidance' to setting social rents across the country through primary legislation and work was underway to legislate through 'The Welfare Reform and Work Bill', the impact of which was discussed. The resulting effect was that for the 2016/17 year, the Council would need to set its social rents (HRA), 1% lower than the rents current in this year with a base line date of 8 July 2015.

The Officer updated the Committee on the HRA, 30 Year financial Business plan which was updated in January 2015. It was highlighted that the estimated average weekly rent for the current year was £104.70 and that Government proposals would produce a total estimated loss in potential rental income of £9.7m and an average decrease of 3.9% in weekly rent over the next four years. This equated to an approximate loss of 60 new social properties and over a ten year period the cumulative estimated loss of rental income could be £30m.

Members noted the position over the next four years where in addition to the rent decreases, the HRA would progress with the re procurement of its Repairs, Maintenance and Investment contract. This would continue to require investment until the new contract was in place but would result in a new contract that offered better value for money, focussing more effectively on meeting tenants' housing needs and aspirations and other improvements.

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The Officer discussed further proposed changes that would likely impact on the HRA and the Council's tenants in the new few years, relating to 'Pay to Stay' and the sale of high value council houses, which was linked to the proposed introduction of 'right to buy' for Housing Association tenants.

A Member raised whether the proposed increase in service charge would result in improved services to residents. The Committee agreed that issue of an increase in fee service charges and the service provided for this be discussed at a future meeting of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel.

**Resolved** - That the Committee note the following, which would be considered at 26<sup>th</sup> January Council meeting:

- (a) Council house dwelling rents for 2016/17 to **decrease by 1%** over the 2015/16 rent with effect from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016. This is in line with current government guidelines and legislation.
- (b) Garage rents, heating, utility and ancillary charges to **increase by 0.8%** with effect from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016. This is based upon the September RPI figure.
- (c) Service charges to **increase by 0.8%** with effect from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016. This is based upon the September RPI figure.
- (d) 'Other committee' property rents to increase by an average of 0.8% from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016 in line with the September RPI figure.

### 46. **Town Centre Car Parking Task and Finish Group - Update on Recommendations**

Savio DeCruz, Head of Transport, outlined a report to update the Committee on the progress made regarding the recommendations of the Town Centre Car Parking Task & Finish Group. Members were reminded that the Group's recommendations were approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015, and discussed by Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015.

The Officer updated Members on the nine recommendations adopted by the Committee and discussed the current position on the outstanding items, i.e. numbers 1, 4, 5 and 8 as set out in the report:

- That the current policy of zero parking be reviewed, with a future ratio to be specified subject to further research by Slough Borough Council (SBC) and justification.  
**This policy would be taken forward as part of the review of the Local Plan**
- That land adoption be used to increase SBC's control of parking (e.g. Kittiwake House, the area in Mill Street outside Foundry Court).  
**Recommendation approved by Cabinet**
- That the current limit of 5,000 parking spaces be reviewed, using the justification for it at the time of its creation and variations in the situation

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since this time (e.g. parking at Tesco's, Crossrail) to reappraise the figure.

**This would be taken forward as part of the review of the Local Plan**

- That the size of loading and unloading bays be reviewed to facilitate their use by larger vehicles.

**Recommendation approved by Cabinet**

The Committee had a general discussion relating to the town centre car parks. In particular, it was noted that a mobile telephone app had been implemented, which had resulted in a £37,000 increase in funds to the Council for the financial year 2015/16. Responding to whether the Council would give consideration to the introduction of an advantage card for residents, officers confirmed that there were no plans to introduce a residents card at present.

**Resolved** - That the update be noted.

### 47. Casework Task and Finish Group

Dave Gordon, Scrutiny Officer, outlined a report to review the final draft report of the Member Casework Task and Finish Group (TFG) and agree the resulting recommendations.

The TFG had agreed its terms of reference, on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015 and had worked with Officers to gather information and use this in the compilation of its final recommendations. At its first meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015, the TFG had examined the areas outlined its terms of reference, as set out in the final report. It was highlighted that a major concern identified was that the process had not been upgraded for a significant period of time, and therefore had limited functionality and could become obsolete relatively soon. There were particular concerns over the way in which the progress of cases could be tracked by Councillors and the amount of Officer time spent on pursuing updates. It was concluded that improved efficiency could be generated through investment in an upgraded system and recommendations to this effect were made.

The TFG had also discussed the level of standardisation of responses given by SBC and it was hoped that the suggested recommendations, including the process used to convey the decision would improve clarity around the decision made and the reasoning in each case. It was highlighted that the TFG had discussed the potential need to be clearer with residents about the resources available to SBC, and budgetary constraints. At present, Members felt that residents were being informed that an action could be fulfilled, only to discover subsequently that SBC could not complete the work due to financial or workforce restraints.

A recommendation had also been made to improve communications and ensure that all Ward Councillors were made aware of any decision which

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impacted on their Ward so that they could better convey information to local residents.

### **Resolved -**

- (1) That the possibility of a system upgrade be investigated, with the system requiring the following elements to justify its procurement;
  - The ability to act as a central repository for casework, from submission to completion or final decision;
  - The ability to be interrogated by officers, allowing previous cases on the same policy matters to be found and used in decision making;
  - The ability to be accessed via Councillors' iPads; and
  - The ability to be accessed by residents via the Slough Borough Council (SBC) website to track the progress of their cases.
- (2) For any such system to include automated escalation points, whereby inaction by an established deadline would cause responsible officers to receive an alert;
- (3) SBC officers will be asked to establish previous decisions made in comparable cases where applicable, in order to avoid any inconsistencies in decisions made, actions taken or advice given to residents;
- (4) SBC officers to ensure that final responses are sent to residents, with the relevant Councillor copied into the response. Councillors are to be made aware that this is the standard procedure and should not act as spokespeople for decisions made by officers; and
- (5) In cases where the decision made or the action taken has an impact across their ward, Councillors are to inform other Councillors in that ward.

## **48. Forward Work Programme**

Members considered details of the Committee's work programme.

**Resolved –** That the current work programme for the 2015/16 municipal year be noted, subject to the addition of the following report:

- LABV Progress Report – 3 March 2016.

## **49. Attendance Record**

**Resolved -** That details of the Members Attendance Record be noted.



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### **50. Date of Next Meeting - 4 February 2016**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2016.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.30 pm)