

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 15th September, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bedi, N Holledge, Parmar, Sadiq and R Sandhu

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Chahal, Matloob, Munawar, Plenty, Sharif, Smith and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor A Sandhu and Usmani

PART I

15. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

16. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 14th July 2016

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2016 be approved as a correct record.

17. Member Questions

None received.

18. Financial and Performance Report - Quarter 1 2016-17

Stephen Fitzgerald, Interim Assistant Director Finance and Audit, outlined details of the Financial and Performance Report 2016/17 Quarter 1. The Council was forecasting an overspend of £0.119m as at month 3. Most areas were spending within their budgets and overspends within Regeneration, Housing and Resources (RHR) had been partly offset by underspends within the same directorate. Work was continuing within this directorate to minimise any potential overspends. It was noted that the RHR - Housing And Environment overspend of £457k was due to homelessness pressures on temporary accommodation costs and an overspend in the Home Improvements section due to changes in funding sources, including a reduction in the capital programme funding and therefore the number of projects that staff were able to work on. A potential forecast overspend of £250k within the Customer and Community services directorate was due to agency staffing and reduction in DWP administration grants.

A summary of the projected capital expenditure by directorate was outlined. The Council expected to spend 64% of the total programme by the end of the 2016/17 financial year.

The Committee were informed that of the 9 Gold projects three projects were assessed as 'Green', three as 'Amber' and three as 'Red'.

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Concern was raised relating to the format of information presented within the report and the fact that the financial information was no longer accurate by the time the Committee met. The Interim Director, Finance and Audit informed Members that future reports would be revised and information presented in a manner which would highlight a clear assessment of progress being made. Financial details within the report would be presented on a monthly rather than quarterly basis.

It was brought to Members attention that at the end of the first year of the 5 Year Plan (5YP) a review was carried out by the Outcome Leads. Following the review it was decided that the indicators be streamlined to allow a greater degree of focus and scrutiny. The number of indicators monitored within the balanced scorecard had been reduced from 91 to 17 core indicators. It was agreed that the list of 91 indicators would be circulated to the Committee.

Members discussed a range of issues which included:

- *Appointment of Director of Children's Services.* A number of Members expressed concern in the delays in appointing a Director of Children's Services. The Interim Chief Executive, Roger Parkin, explained that this was a joint appointment between the Council and Slough Children's Services Trust and that delays in the process had been due to procedural errors. Interviews for the post were scheduled to take place on 30 September 2016.
- *Concerns regarding the perception of an increase in crime and more specifically an increase in hate crime following the impact of BREXIT.* It was agreed that reports that had recently been discussed at the Safer Slough partnership would be circulated to the Committee.
- *Measures in place to address the Council's forecast overspend of £0.119m as at month 3.* It was noted that the overspend primarily related to Adult Social Care and a closer reporting relationship between Director's and Heads of Service was essential to ensure assertive action was being taken to address the issues that arose. A Member expressed concern regarding the overspend in Adult Social Care especially given that the service had received an extra 2% in addition to its allocated funds. The Interim Assistant Director, Finance and Audit explained that a number of factors had contributed to the overspend including demographic pressures and a significant reduction in revenue grant funding. Whilst acknowledging Members concerns regarding resources, it was explained that securing the best outcome for service users remained the priority.
- *Slippage on capital housing projects.* The Head of Neighbourhood Services, John Griffiths, informed Members that the Housing Service were currently in the process of undertaking a stock survey at each property to determine actual works that were required. It was anticipated that this process would be complete in January 2017. Capital works would be determined on actual work required and represent greater value for money.

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- *Concern regarding the use of agency and interim staff.* A number of Members expressed concern regarding the number of senior management team who were currently interim staff. The issue of agency staff employed on a long term basis and a potential forecast overspend of £250k within the Customer and Community Services Directorate due to agency staffing was also raised. The Interim Chief Executive stated that a review of all agency workers at the Council was currently being undertaken which would include addressing the possibility of transferring agency staff to permanent contracts with the organisation. Details relating to ratio of agency staff versus permanent staff would be circulated to the Committee.
- *What measures were in place to revitalise the High Street.* It was noted that a number of major projects in close vicinity to the High Street, including development of the former library site and Thames Valley University site would contribute to revitalising the High Street. A Town Centre Manager was also in post. A Member queried whether there were adequate parking facilities for visitors when attending the High Street. The Interim Chief Executive stated that there were several large car parks within the immediate vicinity of the High Street. Members were also reminded that following a Task and Finish Group review of Town Centre Parking last year, it was determined that current town centre car parks had sufficient capacity and were being under used.

Resolved – That the current financial forecast position, balanced scorecard and update on Gold projects be noted.

19. Electoral Cycle

The Returning Officer, Catherine Meek advised the Committee of the processes involved in changing the Council's electoral cycle from election by thirds to whole council elections every four years. At present each Member served a term of four years, producing a four yearly cycle of elections. The consultation process and procedure that would need to be implemented to move to whole council elections was outlined. It was highlighted that a change to the electoral cycle would also impact on Parish Councils. The merits of holding elections by thirds or whole council elections were brought to Members attention.

Councillors Smith and Wright addressed the Committee under Rule 30. It was submitted that whole Council elections would provide the Council with a clear mandate for four years; allowing it to adopt a more strategic long term approach to policy and decision making.

Councillor Plenty also spoke under Rule 30, stating elections by thirds provided for continuity of councillors and therefore avoiding disruption to on-going policies. The Committee were also provided with details of an email that had been submitted by Councillor Swindlehurst, which put forward a number of points in support of elections by thirds.

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A number of points were raised in the ensuing discussion which included what the estimated financial savings that were likely to be achieved by implementing a four yearly election cycle. Members were informed that if Borough elections were combined with a national election (General, European, Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC)) the cost of the election was shared. A move to whole council elections would lead to a financial saving for the Council in the three years where there was no Borough election. It was noted that although a saving of up to £100k could be realised over the four year period, this assumed that Parliamentary, European and PCC elections would be held on the same day – if not any saving would be reduced.

Having considered details of the report and representations submitted by R30 Councillors the Committee decided, on balance, that no changes be recommended to the current electoral cycle.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted and the current electoral cycle of election by thirds remain.

20. Procurement of Environmental Services

Mr Hannon, Environmental Strategy and Governance Manager, reminded the Committee that the Waste Collection / Management, Street Cleaning, Grounds Maintenance and Highways reactive work functions for Slough Borough Council was currently delivered by Amey under the Environmental Services contract. This contract was due to expire in November 2017.

A dedicated commissioning process was conducted whereby the preferred contract delivery vehicle and service batching was appraised and assessed against critical criteria, including financial implications and risks. This also included feedback from the market through a soft market testing day undertaken in January 2016.

The risks of providing an in-house service against the risk of outsourcing the services to the market were outlined. A greater emphasis on provision of commercial services, ability to identify and absorb risk as an Authority, to mitigate excess cost and reduce overheads paid to the private sector were all factors which contributed to the 'in-house provision' option.

It was brought to Members attention that the preferred option of insourcing the service could be delivered by either bringing the service in as a DSO (Direct Services Organisation also known as a DLO – Direct Labour Organisation) or a Teckal Company - limited by shares with the Council as the sole shareholder. It was noted that the Teckal Model company could achieve service benefits for residents as well as providing commercial opportunities not possible with an outsourced model.

The Committee discussed a number of issues in the ensuing discussion. It was queried as to why when the scope of the contract was commissioned the in-house option had not been considered, which had led to a delay in the process. Mr Hannon submitted that in-sourcing should have been considered

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as an option earlier during the process and that lessons had been learnt for any future procurement exercises.

Concern was expressed whether the January 2018 deadline for implementation of the new contract would be met and what assurances could be provided relating to the quality of service provided, given that staff from the current provider would be transferred across to the new company. The Committee were informed that following engagement with Amey, Officers were confident that the new company would be operational by January 2018. It was noted that a robust governance structure would be implemented, including performance monitoring on a quarterly basis.

After due consideration, the Committee agreed that a recommendation be made to Cabinet that the Environmental Services Contract be brought in house and services delivered via a Teckal Company.

Recommended to Cabinet - That an in-house model be developed for the delivery of Environmental Services and Highways from December 2017 and that the service be delivered via a Teckal Company.

21. **Neighbourhood Services - Enforcement of Littering, Fly-Tipping, Anti-Social Behaviour & Enviro-Crime**

The Committee were provided with an update on Neighbourhood Services activities in relation to tackling littering, dog fouling, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and other related enviro-crime and the use of legal powers and tools to tackle such issues.

Members were reminded that Neighbourhood Services provided a key central function tackling issues relating to anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime, becoming a single point of contact within the Council for its customers and partner agencies, and so taking the operational lead for all matters relating to ASB. The Team had developed a close working relationship with a number of partner agencies including the Police and Home Office to ensure effective and sustainable solutions were developed. The Neighbourhoods' Team also led on safeguarding issues, the protection of vulnerable people and the development and management of multi-agency tasking and co-ordination.

It was confirmed that the team did not receive any funding from external agencies and the biggest challenge facing the Neighbourhood Teams was the potential reduction to budget resources as the Council made year on year savings. Officers explained that any further reduction to budgetary resources would seriously diminish the effectiveness and ability of the team to respond to serious issues.

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A number of issues were raised by Members including work undertaken to address the issue of drugs in Slough and housing tenancy issues. The Committee thanked the team for their work and acknowledged that they provided a vital service to residents.

Resolved - That the contents of the report be noted and endorsed.

22. Forward Work Programme 2016/17

Details of the proposed work programme for 2016/17 were outlined by the Scrutiny Officer. Following discussion regarding future agenda items the Committee agreed to recommend to the appropriate forum that a review of the Whistleblowing Policy be undertaken.

A suggestion to add Homelessness to the Work Programme was welcomed and it was agreed that this item would be scheduled for January 2017.

Resolved:

- (1) That a recommendation be made to the appropriate forum that a review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be undertaken.
- (2) A report on Homelessness be added to the work programme and scheduled for January 2017 meeting.

23. Members Attendance Record 2016/17

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

24. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 17th November 2016

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 17th November, 2016.

Members were also reminded of the Joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting with the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel which was scheduled for 26th October 2016.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.37 pm and closed at 9.38 pm)