

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 12th January, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bedi, N Holledge (until 7.55pm), Parmar, Sadiq, A Sandhu, R Sandhu and Usmani (until 8.23pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Bains, Brooker, Chahal, Amarpreet Dhaliwal, Plenty, Smith and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART I

43. Declarations of Interest

Agenda item 10 First Bus: Councillor Brooker, speaking under Rule 30, declared that he was a shareholder in First Bus Company.

44. Minutes of the Meetings held on 26 October 2016 and 17 November 2016.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 26 October 2016 and 17 November 2016 be approved as a correct record.

45. Action Progress Report

The Committee were updated in relation to activity regarding the Action Progress Report.

Resolved - That details of the Action progress report be noted.

46. Member Questions

Details of a question and reply, submitted by Councillor Plenty, relating to Air Quality management zones was circulated to the Committee for information.

47. First Bus - Changes to Services and Timetables

The Committee considered a report on the impacts on the bus network changes recently introduced by First Bus Berkshire. Managing Director First Hampshire, Dorset and Berkshire, Marc Reddy, and General Manager, Simon Goff, joined the meeting and explained the rationale for the changes.

The Committee was informed that:

- The network changes had been introduced in September with the aim of making the public transport network more 'robust' and to increase reliability.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

- Punctuality, stated as the top priority of bus users, had increased from 80% to 91% since the changes were introduced.
- A two-way radio system had been implemented to aid communication to better react to problems on the network to improve operational performance.
- Some adjustments to the services had been made in early December following feedback from the public.
- Further analysis of the changes would continue and services refined in light of the evidence.

Members expressed a number of concerns that had been raised by residents and service users about the network changes including the fact that the reduction in through services meant passengers had to change buses far more frequently, which negated punctuality improvements. The lack of consultation with residents on the specific service changes and the impact on disabled bus users were also highlighted. In response, the First Bus representatives responded by stating that the changes were designed to improve services, that fares had not risen and the importance of working in partnership with the Council to promote public transport was crucial.

Councillors Brooker, Plenty and Amarpreet Dhaliwal addressed the committee under Rule 30, asking about the prior consultation with the Council on the changes and commenting on specific local concerns in Langley. Mr Reddy stated that First worked in consultation with the Council Officers and their comments, and the feedback of passengers, was taken seriously. Councillor Dhaliwal commented that the changes made public transport less attractive and asked about occupancy rates on buses. Detailed information could not be shared due to commercial confidentiality but First assured Members that they were committed to attracting as many people as possible to use their bus services.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Members noted the report and thanked Mr Reddy and Mr Goff for attending the Committee.

Resolved – That the factors that have collectively contributed to the resulting issues since introducing the bus network changes in September 2016 be noted.

48. Performance and Projects Report - Quarter 2 2016/17

Mr Wilcox, Assistant Director Finance and Audit, provided the Committee with details of the performance position of the Council for Quarter 2 of the financial year 2016/17. It was reported that although overall Council performance was generally good there was considerable room for further improvement.

Details of the RAG status for the Corporate Balanced Scorecard indicators were highlighted. Key areas of noteworthy concerns flagged as 'red' were

- Prevalence of children with 'excess weight' at *start* of primary school (Reception) as measured by the NCMP

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

- Prevalence of children with 'excess weight' at *end* of primary school (Year 6) as measured by the NCMP

Both measures were generated annually as part of a nationwide Child Measurement Programme, and in both cases the latest Slough results revealed a higher proportion of children carrying 'excess weight' than the national and regional averages, and an increase in this proportion since the previous year.

During Quarter 2, 34 projects were being undertaken, with nine of those being categorised as Gold Projects. Although the majority of the gold Projects were progressing as anticipated, three projects were assigned with a red status – ERP/Agresso, Environmental Services Contract Procurement and Slough Major Transport Schemes. Members were provided with details relating to what measures had been implemented to mitigate the risks presented by these projects.

A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion including

- Gold Project: School Places Programme – the current status was showing as 'red' and Members requested further details regarding the risks/issues relating to this project.
- Gold Project: Burnham Station Improvement – what assessment criteria had been used to issue a green status for this indicator.
- Corporate Scorecard Performance Measures: Obesity in Children – details relating to what action was being taken to address the issue and what measures the Council could implement to improving this indicator.
- Whether the Council was carrying out its statutory obligations regarding NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) placements.

The Committee were informed that future reports would be received on a quarterly basis after having been considered by Cabinet.

Resolved - That details of the Council's current performance as measured by the indicators within the balanced scorecard and update on Gold projects and performance be noted.

49. Financial Report - Month 7 2016/17

The Committee were provided with an overview of the Council's financial position as at month 7 for the 2016/217 financial year. The Council was forecasting an over spend of £1.596m as at month 7, compared to an overspend forecast of £1.604m in month 6. It was noted that Cabinet were due to receive the financial forecast figures relating to month 8, which would show that the overspend had reduced to £916k.

Members were informed that significant work was being done to control the overspend and officers were confident that the overspend would be contained by the end of the financial year. Responding to concerns whether financial

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

pressures would impact on the delivery of front line services, the Committee were assured that there would not be any impact on any such services.

A Member questioned whether the Council was exploring alternative income streams in an attempt to address the financial overspend. The Assistant Director, Finance and Audit commented that a number of innovative schemes had been developed, including the Strategic Acquisition Fund (commercial income streams to generate additional revenue income) and Slough Urban Renewal (private sector housing developments).

In addition, although there were increasing budgetary pressures on the Adult Social Care budget, the service was scrutinising all areas of expenditure such as agency costs and imposing spend restrictions where possible. Other areas within the directorate were also being explored to try to identify under spends that would contribute to reducing the financial pressure.

A Member asked whether, given recent issues faced by the Council, a review of the Council's public liability / insurance services had been conducted. The Committee were informed no such review had been carried out and that the matter would be looked into.

Resolved – That details of the current financial forecast and the ongoing work by departments to reduce the over spend be noted.

(Councillor Holledge left the meeting)

50. **Call In: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan**

The Committee considered the call-in, deferred from the meeting held on 17th November 2016, of the Cabinet decision of 17th October 2016 to implement a new rents policy as set out in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan.

The Interim Strategic Director Regeneration, Housing & Resources, Mike England, reminded Members of the background to the issue, most pertinently the allocation and rents for the 23 new build Council homes to be made available at Ledgers Road early in 2017. Officers confirmed that as a result of a recent court case, the Local Lettings Plan in place to allocate these homes was now very likely to be unlawful and the properties would therefore be let according to the Council's standard allocations scheme. The Council's wider thinking on the approach to affordable rents had evolved since the original decision and Members were informed that the intention was to develop two types of affordable rented accommodation:

- Slough Rent – at traditional council or housing association target levels.
- Slough Living Rent – to be affordable to those on average incomes in the borough but also to those receiving benefits.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

The approach would be further refined as part of the approval of new housing and planning policies to enable it to apply to Council, housing association and private developments. The current proposal was that at least 25% of new properties would be at the Slough Rent with the remainder at Slough Living Rent. The 23 units at Ledgers Road would be included as part of the 25% at the Slough Rent.

Members discussed a range of issues relating to a variable rent policy including the impact of the Government's decision not to implement the 'Pay to Stay' policy and the fact that the Council was currently required to reduce rents on existing properties. Increasing rents on some new build properties would raise additional income to help stabilise the HRA in the medium term and fund the building of new homes. The Committee welcomed the progress that had been made since the last meeting in refining the strategic approach to affordable rents on new build properties, and it was therefore decided to take no further action in relation to the call-in.

Resolved – That no further action is taken on the call-in.

(Councillor Usmani left the meeting)

51. Local Authority Controlled Company for Environmental Services

The Waste and Environment Manager, Nicholas Hannon, introduced an update report on the progress that had been made since the decision taken by Cabinet in September 2016 to insource the Environmental Services contract through the establishment of a Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC). Cabinet approval would be sought to establish a wholly owned company limited by shares with a Teckal exemption that would be classified as a local authority controlled company. Members noted the governance arrangements, management responsibilities and proposed organisational structure for both the Council and the LACC.

Members raised a number of issues including whether any other authorities had any similar arrangements; the likely financial benefits of insourcing; the specific roles of the 'Financial Director' and 'Operational Director'; and the management of risks and conflicts of interest. In response, the Committee noted that Hounslow had recently set up a Teckal company and the ability to exploit commercial opportunities was intended to deliver financial benefits to the Council. There would be a conflict of interest protocol and the relevant insurances would be put in place to provide the necessary protection. The Committee was assured that risk management had been a key consideration in developing the approach to issues including health and safety, human resources and finance.

Members asked how the new arrangements would provide better control over the services provided to residents and performance management. It was noted that a draft specification of services had been prepared and the importance of enhancing the quality of services was recognised. A specific issue was raised about fly-tipping and it was confirmed that an indicator would

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

be built into the performance monitoring process. In relation to the risk that service standards could dip towards the end of the existing contract, Members were asked to raise any specific concerns with officers.

Councillors Amarpreet Dhaliwal and Bains addressed the Committee under Rule 30 and raised several issues in relation to the governance arrangements, the role of the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee and speed at which the company was being established. Councillor Bains commented that the scale of the task to insource in terms of health and safety, pensions and financial risk was being underestimated. He also asked whether there would be an employee representative on the LACC Board. Following a query, Councillor Bains stated that he no longer worked for the current service provider, Amey. Mr Hannon responded to each of the points raised and confirmed that the governance arrangements had been carefully considered and had been developed having conducted the necessary due diligence. The suggestion to appoint an employee representative to the Board would be considered. Further reports would be provided to Members on other aspects of the insourcing in the coming months.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee noted the governance arrangements, responsibilities for management of the company and that a company limited by shares was considered to be the most appropriate vehicle.

Resolved – That details of the proposed governance arrangements and responsibilities for management of the Local Authority Controlled Company and proposed organisational structure both for the Council and LACC be noted.

52. Transport - Strategy for Slough

The Head of Transport and Highways, Savio DeCruz, introduced a report that summarised the problems of traffic growth and congestion, and detailed the actions the Council was taking to address these issues.

The transport strategy to tackle congestion and promote modal shift as set out in successive Local Transport Plans was noted. However, with significant major traffic flows into and out of Slough on a daily basis it was recognised that there were delays and congestion at peak periods. The Council had successfully attracted funding from the Department for Transport and the Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver a package of public transport and highway improvement schemes including the Bike Hire Scheme, A355 and A332 widening and the SMaRT bus scheme. The Council planned a number of further measures to tackle congestion and was developing a Transport Vision as part of the Local Plan review to seek to accommodate the forecast increase in population and economic growth in Slough.

Members discussed what more could be done to improve school bus services. Mr DeCruz highlighted that the dynamic school population and the complexity of school governance made it difficult to engage schools, however,

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12.01.17

the Council was exploring the potential of a pilot scheme with First Bus for school bus services. Concern was raised about the local transport impacts of new schools opening and expanding in already congested areas such as Bath Road and it was noted that the transport department worked closely with colleagues in education and individual schools to mitigate the traffic problems where possible. In response to a question about the Bike Hire Scheme it was reported that it currently had more than 1,000 members since it began in 2013 and the number of hire stations had risen from 2 to 10 during this period. A Member asked for a breakdown of the figures on the number of local residents, commercial users and SBC staff that used the scheme and it was agreed that this information would be circulated to the Committee.

The Committee was informed of the establishment of a new Transport Forum to improve engagement and were updated on the progress of several major schemes such as the Copthorne roundabout scheme which was almost complete and the first phase of the Mass Rapid Transport scheme which was due to be finished in February 2017. Members raised several other specific local transport issues to which Mr DeCruz responded.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee noted the report.

Resolved – That the transport and highways service planning to deal with traffic growth and the existing congestion issues in the borough at a strategic level be noted.

53. Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer outlined details of the Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year. It was agreed that the Performance and Financial Management report Q3, currently scheduled for the February meeting, would be considered at the April Committee meeting.

Resolved – That details of the Work Programme be noted.

54. Attendance Record

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

55. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 2 February 2017.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.43 pm)