

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 11th January, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Chohan (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), Chaudhry, N Holledge (from 6.39pm), Parmar, Rana (until 8.20pm) and R Sandhu.

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Strutton.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor A Sandhu.

PART I

46. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

47. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 16th November 2017

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2017 be approved as a correct record.

48. Action Progress Report

The Scrutiny Officer gave an update on the current status of the actions agreed at previous meetings of the Committee.

Resolved – That details of the Action Progress Report be noted.

49. Member Questions

None received.

50. Transactional Services: Half-Yearly Report Contract Year 6

The Committee were provided with an overview of the contractual performance for the Thames Valley Transactional Services Public Private Sector Partnership for the period April 2017 – September 2017. It was noted that the contract had continued to demonstrate a steady growth in private sector business and the continued impact on Slough had resulted in increased job opportunities for Slough residents. Where ever possible, arvato made use of local suppliers, further enhancing the local economy.

Details of performance, including achievements and challenges, in a number of areas were outlined and included:

- *Logistics* – the key Performance Indicator (KPI) for this area was below the expected target, which was attributed to the installation of the new scanner, where integration had proven more complex than originally

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anticipated. There was also significant additional work created by the Council's Housing team and the current procedure for dealing with the departments post was outlined for Members.

- *Accounts Payable/Receivable* – successful removal of cheque payments for client suppliers, which were all now paid via BACS method which was cheaper and more efficient.
- *Council Tax Collection Rates* – the collection rate at the end of November 2017 was 75.49%, which was 0.14% less than the 75.63% achieved at the same point last year.

A Member expressed concern that the KPI for Council Tax would not be met. It was noted that council tax collection rates had increased year on year since 2012 and that it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain this upward trajectory. Details regarding Aged Debt and Write Off's, specifically relating to Council Tax, were requested and it was agreed that this information would be circulated to Committee Members. Members were informed that a variety of measures had been adopted to increase collection rates which included payment at Post Office, local convenience stores, direct debit or via telephone.

Responding to whether the most accurate figures relating to the KPI's were available, Officers confirmed that these were now available for the period up to September 2017 and would be sent to Committee Members.

Clarification was sought regarding the recently introduced Business Rates. It was outlined that the rates were determined by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and any appeals were also processed by the VOA. Businesses were billed retrospectively following the outcome of any appeals.

Following a short discussion regarding the Council's Digital Strategy and how this would assist in developing a more positive media profile, it was noted that although arvato worked in partnership with the Council, the Council's internal Communications Team were responsible for handling the Council's media strategy.

Councillor Strutton, present under Rule 30, queried the accuracy of a number of the KPI's, referring specifically to Council Tax Collection Rates and the ICT Service Desk Response rates. Officers explained that the figures referred to the period up to the end of September 2017. It was agreed that the timeline for implementation of the Council's Digital Strategy, in terms of supporting the arvato ICT KPI would be sent to Committee Members.

Resolved – That arvato's performance in delivering the Thames Valley Transactional Services contract for the period of April 2017 – September 2017 be noted.

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51. **Housing Strategy - Theme 4: Homelessness and Housing Need; Theme 5: Special Needs and Vulnerable Groups**

The Committee were provided with an overview of the implementation of the Housing Strategy Action Plan, as approved by Cabinet in March 2017, specifically in relation to Theme 4, Homelessness and Housing Need, and Theme 5 Special Needs and Vulnerable Groups.

The Service Lead, Strategic Housing Services detailed the pressures facing the service, which included an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation from 74 in 2013/14 to 378 in 2017/18, which represented an increase of 510% within a four year period. There remained over 2,500 applicants on the Housing Register despite only around 300-400 social housing allocations being made each year. It was brought to Members attention that affordability of the private rented sector was a major issue facing the Borough and the increase in homelessness could be directly attributed to an increase in house prices and private sector rent increases. Many households who were unable to access home ownership or social housing were being accommodated in the growing private rented sector. In addition, the private rented market in Slough continued to experience increasing pressures from London/outside Boroughs.

The Committee were informed that a number of measures had been introduced to address the issue of homelessness, which included the introduction of a Slough Living Rent (SLR) which recognised the situation of many of the Borough's working residents who could not afford market rents and did not qualify for the Council's Housing Register. The SLR provided an opportunity for intermediate-type housing solutions for these residents as the SLR rates were linked to actual household incomes and not market rental rates.

A Member requested further details regarding the impact of households being placed in the Borough from London and other neighbouring authorities. It was explained that during the period September 2016 to August 2017, a total of 178 households were placed in the Borough's private sector rental market. The impact on the Council only arose once those tenancies came to an end and households presented themselves as homeless to the Council, who then had a statutory duty to consider their housing needs as they were now living within the Borough.

Members were informed that the Council was in the process of developing a Homelessness Strategy, which would include prevention measures in partnership with clients, landlords, the voluntary sector and other partner agencies. In recognising that the Council did not have all the resources to tackle the issue, a Slough Homelessness Forum had been established to ensure regular dialogue was maintained with local charities.

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In response to alleviating pressures on temporary accommodation and Bed and Breakfast provision, the Council had set up a Subsidiary Housing Company to acquire homes. James Elliman Homes was set up in 2017 and the Company had purchased the existing temporary accommodation schemes from the Council at Pendeen Court and High Street, Langley. The aim was to alleviate the current financial burdens on the Council by using a full cost recovery model for providing the accommodation and to improve the quality and security of existing accommodation. It was noted that the 29 accommodation units at Pendeen Court were due to be refurbished in summer 2018. Furthermore, the acquisition of affordable housing on private development sites was being progressed, with 21 units on Stoke Road being purchased for this purpose.

Councillor Strutton, speaking under Rule 30, expressed disappointment that the concept of Modular Homes had not been explored further. The Service Lead, Strategy Housing Services stated that the issue would be considered when discussions took place with regard to Temporary Accommodation provisions.

Details regarding the number of individuals re-housed in the Slough area due to Domestic Violence were requested and it was agreed that the information would be circulated to the Committee.

Resolved – That the escalating homelessness situation and the interventions being made to help reduce the numbers of homeless households in the borough; whilst assisting Adult Social Care and Slough Children Services Trust in line with the Council's Manifesto and relevant strategies and plans be noted.

52. Five Year Plan Refresh for 2018/19 - 2022/23

The Service Lead, Strategy & Performance introduced a report on the refresh of the Council's Five Year Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 and the role of the committee and panels in scrutinising and adding value to the plan.

Following the launch of the Five Year Plan in 2015 there had been an annual refresh of the priorities and outcomes. This process was underway for the plan to be agreed by Cabinet and the Council in February 2018 and a draft outlined was noted as at Appendix A to the report. The links between the plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy were important and work was ongoing to ensure they were properly aligned.

Members discussed the future arrangements for scrutiny of the plan and it was proposed that an informal meeting of the Committee be held prior to the start of the next municipal year to discuss the impact that scrutiny had had and to consider how future arrangements could be improved.

Resolved – That details of the Five Year Plan Refresh for 2018/19 be noted.

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53. Five Year Plan Outcome 3: "Slough will be an attractive place"

The Committee considered an update on Outcome 3 of the Five Year Plan: "Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to love, work and visit." The key actions for the outcome included work to understand resident's perceptions of Slough; promote the town as a safe and vibrant place; enhance cohesion; and to be a place of opportunities for all.

The progress made on each of the key actions was summarised and highlights included research showing that Slough was amongst the best places in the country to live and work and in terms of productivity; the opening of award winning community facilities such as The Curve and Arbour Park; and a range of improvements and activities to town's parks. There was a discussion about conducting a 'Place Survey' during 2018 to improve understanding of residents perceptions.

The Committee expressed concerns about the High Street and the impact on the attractiveness of the town. Whilst the longer term plans for major development of the town centre were noted, Members emphasised the importance of taking more short term actions to encourage people to visit. It was noted that a number of initiatives were planned such as setting up 'pop up' shops in empty units. It was suggested that charges for events be reviewed to encourage more activity. The potential to establish a Business Improvement District was raised and it was agreed that further information on the proposal be sent to members of the Committee.

Members recognised the scale of the task in improving the attractiveness of the town given the wide range of factors involved and the fact that it involved many different partners and external influences. Perceptions of crime was raised in relation to a number of incidents in Salt Hill Park and the Committee was informed a range of activities to address this issue and improve the attractiveness of Slough's parks more generally. The Council was working with Thames Valley Police and other partners on the Safer Slough Partnership to address concerns about anti-social behaviours, drugs and littering. The outcome also included work to protect children and vulnerable people from exploitation and trafficking and Members asked about being done to tackle it. It was requested and agreed that further information on the measures taken to address issues of child protection at licensed hotels within the Borough be sent to the Committee.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the update was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That a residents survey and community / business engagement, especially around the perception of attractiveness and safety in Slough and to identify improvements, be endorsed.
- (b) That the ongoing work for a clean, safe and vibrant Slough town centre be endorsed.

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- (c) That the Committee actively support and promote the future proposals for Outcome 3.

54. Performance & Projects Report - Q2 2017/18

The Performance Manager introduced a report that provided the Committee with the latest performance information to the end of September 2017, the corporate balanced scorecard indicators and update on major projects.

The majority of indicators were on target and the indicator on the prevalence of children with 'excess weight' at the start of primary school had improved from a 'red' to 'green' status. The related indicator for children with 'excess weight' at the end of primary school remained 'red' rated and the Committee discussed the actions the Council was taken to address the issue. The Council Tax in year collection rate had fallen below the profiled target and previous years figure and was now 'amber' rated. Progress on several other indicators was discussed including journey times which was expected to become 'red' rated in the next quarter and was therefore the subject of discussion with management about what steps could be taken to improve performance.

Members discussed the impact of the Programme Management Office and it was noted that it the work it carried out in reviewing key projects and identifying the learning points helped ensure projects were clearly focused on their outcomes and contributed to the continuous improvement of the delivery of other major projects.

It was noted that future reports would include a RAG rating for Gold Projects and it was agreed that a summary of Gold Projects, including benefits achieved and lessons learnt, would be circulated to the Committee following completion of projects. At the conclusion of the discussion, the report was noted.

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

55. Work Programme 2017/18

The Scrutiny Officer outlined details of the Forward Work Programme for the Committee in 2017/18.

Resolved – That the Forward Work Programme be updated as follows:

15th March 2018

- Obesity Task and Finish Group Recommendations

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12th April 2018

- Five Year Plan Refresh – informal discussion following the conclusion of the meeting.

56. Members' Attendance Record 2017/18

Resolved - That details of the Members Attendance Record 2017/18 be noted.

57. Date of Next Meeting - 1st February 2018

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 1st February 2018.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.13 pm)