

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 11th July, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Sarfraz (Vice-Chair), Gahir, Hulme, D Parmar, S Parmar and R Sandhu.

Also present under Rule 30:- None.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Basra

PART I

7. Declarations of Interest

In relation to Minute No.11 (agenda item 5 – Bus Fares and Accessibility) Councillor Gahir declared that he was a Hackney Carriage Driver. He remained in the room and took part in the discussion relating to the report.

In relation to Minute No.11 (agenda item 5 - Bus Fares and Accessibility) Councillor Hulme declared that she was a frequent bus user. She remained in the room and took part in the discussion relating to the report.

8. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 13th June 2019

In response to a request at the previous meeting a list of the Council's major contracts was circulated to the Committee.

Resolved –

(a) That the major contracts list be noted.

(b) That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2019 be approved as a correct record.

9. Member Questions

None had been received.

10. Section 106 Money Unspent

The Special Projects Planner presented a report detailing the Council's unspent Section 106 monies, how the income was allocated and the time limits for spending the funds.

Members were informed that as at June 2019, the current balance of S106 planning obligation financial contributions held and unspent was £10.2 million. It was explained that £8.7 million was a more accurate figure, as this excluded money held for longer term maintenance of open spaces transferred to the Council by some developers.

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93% of the £8.7 million had already been committed to specific works, projects or tasks. The majority of the £8.7 million sum related to proposed capital works, the remaining was collected for non-capital items. Non-capital items included Travel Plan monitoring and funding for bus passes. Consequently, £7 million was the current balance held for capital works, most of which was for proposed highway and transport works.

Members were advised that there were several reasons for the current balance, including: if funding was a contribution towards part of a project, time was needed to gather additional money before committing to spend, and budget holders required flexibility to spend money held for investment.

In most cases the S106 planning obligation specified how the financial contribution must be spent and on what project. Sometimes this was very specific and at other times it was more general and allowed flexibility. Each contribution had a designated budget holder who was informed when a S106 was signed, when income was expected and any restrictions about how it could be spent, in particular the time limits for it to be spent. Precisely how and when money was spent was the responsibility of the budget holder. The time limit for spending S106 money was normally fixed at five, eight or ten years from receipt. Five years was the accepted guideline in most circumstances, but officers were able to seek a longer period if necessary.

It was confirmed that the Council had never returned S106 funds to a developer or landowner due to it being unspent within the set time frame. Occasionally, developers or agents contacted officers to ask if the money was being spent correctly within the required time limit.

A discussion ensued, during which the following issues were raised:

- Housing schemes in Slough Town Centre often did not include social housing as developers did not consider it financially viable to incorporate this provision. Members asked for further information about the number of new housing schemes that provided social housing to be circulated to the Committee.
- Members asked for the details of any outstanding S106 money that had not yet been collected to be circulated to the Committee.
- In response to a query about how the Council pursued developers for unpaid S106 money, Members were informed that a S106 was a legally binding agreement and ultimately if an agreed contribution was not provided to the Council the matter could be settled in court.

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- Planning officers considered the viability of a scheme and the S106 contribution offered and assessed these considerations as part of the decision-making process.
- It was confirmed that a S106 obligation remained attached to the land, therefore if a developer become insolvent and unable to complete a scheme, the S106 obligation remained and transferred to the next land owner.
- Members asked how common it was for developers to declare a scheme unviable and subsequently negotiate a lower S106 contribution. In response, the Special Projects Planner advised that this situation was uncommon and had only occurred on a few occasions.
- New regulations coming into force in September 2019 required the Council from 2020 to publish an infrastructure funding statement listing Section 106 money received and spent. It was expected that a national standardised format for categorising and listing contributions to be available for local authorities to use. Members requested a copy of the statement before it was published.
- It was noted that the Government currently limited S106 pooling to five contributions for any one infrastructure project. This meant that any large project requiring more than five contributions had to wait until other funding sources were available. This restriction would be relaxed in September 2019. The restriction did not and would not apply to affordable housing.
- Members noted that the Council's policy required an affordable housing contribution for any new scheme above 15 units.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) The information requested by Members as detailed above be circulated to the Committee.

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11. Bus Fares and Accessibility

The Transport Strategy Team Leader introduced a report that provided a summary of local authority powers and considerations relating to bus fares and accessibility.

Members were informed that bus services in Slough were provided by a number of companies and most of these operated commercially, which meant there was no contract with the local authority. Consequently, bus companies ran routes they could make a commercial return from. The Council subsidised a limited number of services. Analysis set out in the report showed that the fares in Slough were generally comparable with other neighbouring authorities.

Members had a wide ranging discussion during which the following points were raised:

- In relation to fares, concern was raised that some operator's tickets were not valid on other operator's services. For example, a journey between Chippenham and Wexham Park Hospital required a passenger to purchase two separate tickets to complete their journey.
- Members felt that fare prices were overly complicated and services did not meet the needs of residents. It was highlighted that if residents were to be encouraged to use public transport rather than car travel, service provision needed to be improved.
- Bus service provision needed to support Slough's long-term redevelopment plans and the creation of a vibrant night-time economy.
- It was suggested that Slough Council establish its own bus company, similar to Reading Transport Limited, a bus operator owned by Reading Borough Council.
- Equalities issues relating to bus use were discussed. It was noted that the majority of bus users were women, older people and people on low incomes.
- Concerns were raised about the removal of bus stops, wide kerbs and buses causing traffic congestion.
- A Member asked if the Council was able to influence the bus routes operated and subsidise some fares.

The Transport Strategy Team Leader informed Members that the Council would be looking to procure a Real Time Passenger Information System (RTPI) in due course. The Council would fund the RTPI infrastructure and bus operators would provide the data to support the system.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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12. Performance and Projects Report Quarter 4 2018/19

Consideration was given to a report that provided the latest performance information for the 2018-19 financial year, including the Corporate Balanced Scorecard, an update on the progress of 26 key Council projects and the delivery of current manifesto commitments.

The Corporate Balanced Scorecards showed there had been improved performance in adult care direct payments, the uptake of health checks, households in temporary accommodation and Business Rate income.

Progress continued to be made on all major schemes and projects. Key improvements in Quarter 4 included the commencement of works on Grove Academy, the opening of a new leisure centre, and the securing of funding from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to provide private rented housing in Slough.

With regards to manifesto commitments, it was reported that at the end of Quarter 4, 95% of pledges were rated overall as 'Green' (achieved or on schedule), 5% 'Amber' (working towards) and none rated as 'Red'. It was noted that the following pledges had been delivered during the quarter: continued provision of flagship parks, allotments and public spaces; planting of one million bulbs and 200 trees across Slough, and the completion of a new leisure centre on Farnham Road.

Members discussed the report and highlighted the following:

- Manifesto Pledge 12 – *Take action against fly-tipping by seeking prosecutions against serious and prolific offender.* Members queried why the target was showing as 'Amber'. It was explained that the implementation of the 'Love Clean Streets' mobile app had been delayed while it was determined if the Council's planned new website and IT solution as part of the Transformation Programme could provide a more effective mechanism.
- Members noted that the number of adults managing their care via a direct payment had increased. Some concern was raised about the quality of care and how the service was monitored. It was suggested that the Health Scrutiny Panel or Slough Wellbeing Board could consider this issue.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

13. Slough Borough Council - Annual Report 2018/19

The Committee gave consideration to the Council's draft Annual Report, detailing the progress and achievements made against the Five Year Plan for 2018-19.

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The Five Year Plan defined the Council's ambition, the opportunities and challenges faced, the role of the Council in meeting these and the priority outcomes against which resources would be allocated.

Members discussed the report and highlighted the following:

- Fly-Tipping - Members asked if the Council had any plans to install CCTV cameras to deter and catch offenders and that any details be included in the report.
- With regard to Outcome 1: *Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful* – It was noted that Slough schools had outperformed national and neighbouring authorities averages for educational attainment in 2018/19. Members felt more emphasis should be placed on this success and that it be widely publicised. The Committee requested that further information and context be included in this section of the report.
- Outcome 4: *Our residents will live in good quality homes* – Members asked if the Council was on target to meet its long-term housing strategy. In relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), it was noted that 'the numbers of both Licensed HMOs and applications made were far lower than expected'. Members queried how many applications for licenced HMOs were anticipated. In relation to Homelessness, Members asked how many households were housed in temporary accommodation on a monthly basis.

Resolved –

- (a) That the achievements of Slough Borough Council set out in the draft Annual Report 2018-19 be noted.
- (b) That the comments raised by Members, as set out above, be taken into consideration prior to the finalisation of the Annual Report 2018-19.

14. Forward Work Programme 2019/20

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme and agreed to add the following items:

12 September 2019

Localities Strategy Update

A briefing note regarding the disposal of Land North of Norway Drive

The Senior Democratic Services Officer was requested to confirm that a Heathrow representative would be available to attend the next meeting. If it was not possible for a representative to attend, it was agreed that an Adult

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Social Care Transformation Programme report would be provided to the Committee.

14 November 2019

Revenue Budget and Treasury Management Strategy

Resolved – That the Forward Work Programme be noted and amended as set out above.

15. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20

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

16. Date of Next Meeting - 12th September 2019

Resolved – The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12th September 2019.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm)