

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 14th November, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Basra, Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, D Parmar, S Parmar and R Sandhu

Also present under Rule 30:- None

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Sarfraz

PART I

25. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Gahir declared that he was a taxi driver. He remained in the Council Chamber throughout the meeting.

26. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 12th September 2019

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

27. Member Questions

None had been received.

28. Presentation from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable

The Chair welcomed Matthew Barber, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC) and Chief Constable, John Campbell to the meeting.

Ahead of receiving presentations, the Chair and a number of Members expressed concern and discontent that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Anthony Stansfeld was not in attendance. The Chair asked for the concerns of the Committee to be relayed to the PCC and that he be requested to attend future meetings in person.

Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner

The Committee was provided with a presentation that outlined the role and responsibilities of the PCC and presented an overview of crime in the Thames Valley area.

The PCC's responsibilities included: holding the Chief Constable to account for policing; developing a Police and Crime Plan; setting the policing precept, scrutinising performance, engaging with communities; commissioning services and awarding grants to support victims of crime.

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Members were informed that the strategic priorities of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Plan 2017-21 were: prevention and early intervention; providing support to vulnerable people; police ethics and reform; serious organised crime and terrorism; and reducing re-offending.

In relation to funding, it was highlighted that: £3 million had been provided to support victims of crime across the Thames Valley area; £199,000 had been awarded from the Police Property Act Fund during 2018/19 to charities and community groups aiming to reduce crime and reoffending; £2.7 million Community Safety Funding had been provided to local authorities to help deliver crime reduction, prevention and support services.

It was reported that overall crime remained at historically low levels across the Thames Valley area; there had been 21,671 fewer crimes reported compared to 10 years previously. However, crime in Thames Valley had increase by 10% compared to the national increase of 8%. Violence against the person offences had risen by 40.7%, compared to a 20% increase nationally. Sexual offences had increased by 16.2% over the past year; burglary of dwellings had decreased by 2% compared to a 3% decrease nationally; criminal damage and arson had decreased by 2.6% compared to a 3% decrease nationally; drug offences had increased by 9.9% and possession of weapons offences had increased by 28.2% compared to a 19% increase nationally.

With regard to call response performance, it was reported that as of September 2019, the average time to answer 101 calls was three minutes; this represented an improvement on performance last year, during which the average answer time was eight minutes.

Thames Valley Police

Chief Constable John Campbell provided Members with an overview of policing operations, priorities and crime trends for Slough and the wider Thames Valley area.

The Chief Constable began by setting out the priorities of Thames Valley Police and the operational and organisational actions undertaken to deliver on the priority outcomes. These included: reducing crime and incidents through targeted and effective problem-solving; and responding appropriately and improving communications with victims of crime, by improving non-emergency call answering times. It was highlighted that the average time taken to answer 101 calls had recently reduced from eight minutes (April – September 2018) to three minutes (September 2019).

With regard to crime prevention, Members were informed that combatting serious violence, reducing knife crime, disrupting organised crime gangs, tackling county drug lines, including highlighting the issue of 'casual', as opposed to habitual drug use, were key priorities.

The Chief Constable highlighted the challenges faced by Thames Valley Police force, which included maintaining establishment levels, managing

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budget shortfalls, ensuring high quality investigations and improving call handling performance. In addition, the numbers of officer assaults that had occurred in Slough during 2019 were highlighted. It was reported that 61 officers had been assaulted during use of force incidents; 33 officers had been spat at; and one officer had been exposed to a blood borne virus risk.

The Chair thanked the DPCC and Chief Constable for their presentations and invited comments and questions from the Committee.

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

- Concerns were expressed regarding the use of Stop and Search and Section 60 powers, which allowed a police officer to stop and search a person without 'reasonable suspicion'. A Member asked how the police would ensure people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities would not be unfairly targeted. The Chief Constable explained that whilst undertaking a stop and search, police officers were mindful of maintaining the dignity of the person being searched. All police officers wore body cameras and the footage could be reviewed if there was concern about the handling of an incident. He said the Thames Valley Police had received very few complaints regarding the use of stop and search. He explained that Section 60 powers were used to search people in a defined area, during a specific time period, when it was believed, with good reason, that serious violence would occur and it was necessary to use the powers to prevent such violence. The use of Section 60 powers could only be authorised by a senior police officer.
- In relation to crime rates, a Member noted that Thames Valley Police funding had been cut by £100 million since 2010 and a further £15 million of funding cuts would be implemented over the next four years. It was noted that last year, recorded crime had increased by 10%, violent crime had increased by 40%, sexual offences were up by 16%, and possession of weapons was up 28%. A Member said the funding cuts had led to an increase in crime. In addition, it was asked why these figures were all above the national average and where the crime rates had decreased, why the decrease had been lower in Slough than the national average. The DPCC explained that some types of crime were 'localised' and some crimes, such as rape and child abuse had historically been underreported but victims were now much more likely to take action. In addition, he said drug and weapon possession became recorded as crimes when the items were recovered from a person who had been searched by a police officer. Therefore, the increase in reported crimes of this nature could be viewed as a positive because it indicated that more people were being stopped and searched by the police. He said there was no direct correlation between the reduction in funding and higher rates of crime. He further explained that the police were increasingly undertaking preventative measures, including partnership working, to reduce the risk of crime occurring.

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- A Member asked why BAME people were more likely to be stopped and searched. The DPPC highlighted that due to the diverse population, the percentage of people stopped and searched, who identified as BAME, in Slough, would be higher than it may be in other areas in the Thames Valley area.
- It was noted that there had been a 44% rise in knife crime since 2010; the DPCC was asked what was being done to tackle the issue. It was explained that the Early Intervention Youth Fund was used to deliver a programme of activities in partnership with organisations across Thames Valley to jointly tackle youth violence, vulnerability and exploitation. The PCC led on the programme through Community Safety Partnerships, which included the police, youth offending teams, youth service providers, local authorities, secondary schools and charities. Funding had been awarded to providers to carry out a range of activities across Thames Valley, including awareness raising in schools to target young people involved in gang and knife crime.
- A Member asked if some crimes, for example, shoplifting, were given a low priority status and/or no police taken was taken. The Chief Constable explained that police resources were prioritised and investigations focussed on serious and violent crimes. However, the police endeavoured to explore all lines of enquiry for all reported crimes.
- Concerns were raised about funding cuts and the reduction in the number of front line police officers. The Chief Constable recognised that increasing the numbers of police officers would enable the police force to be more effective; however, he said there were a number of preventative measures that could be deployed to reduce crime rates. He provided an example of a project that had involved providing homeless people with accommodation and employment with Tesco supermarket in Slough. The project had successfully reduced the reported incidents of anti-social behaviour that had been occurring in the Tesco car park area.
- In relation to recruitment and retention, the Chief Constable highlighted the challenges of retaining police officers in the South East, due to the high cost of living and the restrictive police pay framework. In addition, he reported that increasingly officers were transferring out of the Metropolitan Police due to the high cost of living not being offset by the London 'weighting'.
- A Member asked if there was a good working relationship between the PCC and the Chief Constable, and if the Thames Valley Police force felt supported by the PCC. The Chief Constable said the PCC robustly held him to account and was very supportive of the police force.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed its condolences to the family of PC Andrew Harper and commended him for the sense of duty he had displayed carrying out his duties.

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- (b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wished to formally recognise and extend its thanks to the police officers of Slough for their hard work to make Slough and its residents safe.
- (c) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised concerns regarding police budget cuts which had led to an increase in crime. Members requested that more resources and police officers be provided in Slough.

29. Performance and Projects Report Quarter 1 2019/20

The Strategic Programme Management Office Manager introduced a report that set out the latest performance information for Quarter 1 of 2019/20. Including: the corporate balanced scorecard indicators; an update on the progress of projects on the portfolio; and progress on the delivery of manifesto commitments.

The Performance Insight Manager provided a presentation to the Committee which highlighted: key areas of performance improvement; areas of noteworthy concern; a summary of projects; and the overall status of manifesto pledges in Quarter 1.

Members noted that there were 22 high level performance measures included in the Corporate Balanced Scorecard, of which 10 were rated as green; 4 were rated as amber; 5 were rated as red; and 3 currently had no agreed target value.

Key performance improvements had been made in the following:

- The number of adults managing their care and support via a direct payment had continued to rise.
- The uptake of targeted health checks had risen to 3.2%, which was above the national average of 2.3%.
- The crime rate offence rate for Slough had improved by 8% from the previous quarter, which was greater than both the Most Similar Groups (MSGs) and national average decrease of 4% and 1.9%. For the first time since Quarter 4 2017/18, Slough average crime rate was below MSG average.

Members noted the key areas of noteworthy concern were: the increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation; the number of empty properties brought back into use; and a fall in household recycling rates.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the officers for the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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30. Revenue Financial Budget Monitoring Report 2019-20 - Quarter 1

The Service Lead, Finance (Deputy Section 151) introduced a report that provided an update on the financial position of the Council's revenue account for Quarter 1 (April to June) of the 2019-20 financial year.

The Committee was informed that the 2019/20 approved net budget for the Council was £106.625 million. At Quarter 1, the forecast year end position for all Council run services indicated an overspend of £1.641 million (1.54%). The Service Lead, Finance reported that based on recent information received from the Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) that to ensure visibility, the SCST's financial position should be included in the revenue monitor. It was explained that when the SCST's forecast financial position was included in the revenue monitor, the Council's current exposure to financial risk was an estimated net expenditure forecast of £16.266 million. This represented a potential budget overspend of £9.641 million, which was 9.04% above the approved budget.

A Member raised concern regarding the robustness of SCST's governance arrangements and asked if suitable controls were in place. The Service Lead, Finance explained that SCST had reported that the overspend was due to increases in staffing, placements and legal costs as a result of a spike in referrals during October/November 2018 and January 2019. The increase in referrals had consequently led to more child protection cases and Children Looked After cases arising in 2019/20 than had been initially budgeted for. Officers had been working closely with SCST's leadership team in an effort to understand SCST's current financial position and to support initiatives that would reduce the overspend by the end of the financial year. In addition, Council and SCST officers had been in regular discussions with the Department for Education and the Local Government Association to highlight the on-going financial pressures facing the Trust and Children's Services more generally.

In relation to the 'write offs' detailed on page 69 of the report, a Member queried why these occurred and what measures were in place to recover the debts. In response, the Service Lead, Finance explained that every effort was made to recover the money owed. Write offs were requested as a last resort, when the debtor was untraceable or had absconded.

Resolved –

- (a) That the reported underlying financial position of the Council, including the Slough Children's Services Trust, as at Quarter 1 of the year be noted.
- (b) That the management actions being undertaken by the officers to reduce the budget pressures be noted.

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(c) That the Council's request to the Department for Education (DfE) to provide additional financial support relating to the Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) be noted.

(d) That the potential impact on the Council's general reserves and associated implications for the Council based on the latest financial projections, be noted.

31. Capital Monitoring Report at 30th June 2019

The Service Lead, Finance (Deputy Section 151) introduced a report that summarised spend against capital budgets for the financial year, as at the end of June 2019.

Members were requested to note the report and the capital expenditure of £43.169 million in the first quarter of 2019-20 against an approved budget of £212.520 million. This represented 20% of the approved budget being spent with a current projection that 96% of the budget would be spent by the end of the financial year.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

32. Forward Work Programme 2019/20

The Policy Insight Manager presented the Forward Work Programme and updated Members on relevant items.

9th January 2020

It was noted that 'Frimely Health NHS Foundation Trust – Wholly Owned Subsidiary' had been added to the Work Programme. The Policy Insight Manager explained that this item was subject to an update being available from the Trust's Chief Executive. It was anticipated that this would be confirmed by the end of November 2019.

30th January 2020

Further to a referral from Council on 26th September 2019, a 'LGBT+ inclusion' item had been added to the Work Programme. There was some discussion about establishing a task and finish group. Members agreed to give this further consideration following the 30th January meeting.

12th March 2020

A Member asked for a planning department report to be added to the Work Programme. It was requested that the report include the following:

- The number of agency staff in the department.
- The number of planning applications received and processed.
- The level of staff turnover

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To be scheduled

Heathrow Expansion – It was requested that an update report focussing on economic development, skills and employment in Slough be presented to a future Committee meeting.

Resolved – That, subject to the updates set out above, the Forward Work Programme 2019/20 be approved, as set out in Appendix A of the report.

33. Members' Attendance Record 2019/20

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

34. Date of Next Meeting - 9th January 2020

Resolved – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 9th January 2020.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.05 pm)