

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 6th March, 2012.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Basharat, Davis, Minhas (arrived at 7.00pm), Munawar (until 7.40pm), O'Connor, Plenty and Smith (until 7.40pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Bains, S Chaudhry, Long, Plimmer, Stokes, Strutton and A S Wright

PART I

87. Declaration of Interest

None were received.

88. Minutes of the Last Meeting

It was noted that the minutes of the last meeting would be presented to the next meeting on 10th April, 2012 for approval.

89. Member Questions

None were received.

90. Presentation by Sara Thornton, Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police

Sarah Thornton, CBE, QPM, Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police (TVP), gave a presentation to the Committee, setting out the Strategy for Policing in the Thames Valley 2011-2014. Spt Richard Humphrey, Local Area Commander, Slough Local Police Area, also contributed to the discussion.

Ms Thornton discussed a number of issues including, reducing crimes that were of most concern to the community, the increase in the visible presence of the Police, protecting communities from the most serious harm and improving communication with the public in order to build trust and confidence in communities. The presentation also covered the issue of bureaucracy and the development of staff skills. It was reported that the visibility of the police presence had been increased and the number of front line officers and PCSO numbers had risen by 6.4% demonstrating TVP's continued commitment in this area. The Committee noted that a budget saving of £55.5 m was required over the next 4 years which would be achieved through cost and efficiency savings, whilst continuing to reduce crime and protecting communities.

Ms Thornton highlighted that violent crimes had reduced and that a reduction in neighbourhood boundaries in Slough would be introduced after the Olympics (from 16 areas to 7), giving a smaller number of larger areas.

The Committee was reminded that in November 2012, the public across England and Wales would elect a Police Commissioner who would be accountable for how crime was tackled in their police force area.

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Ms Thornton responded to a number of questions including those relating to the recent newspaper report that 23 Police Officers in the Thames Valley area had a criminal record, and the likelihood that security guards would be used to carry out policing in some areas. Ms Thornton was unable to confirm the location of the 23 Officers but advised it was likely the offences were minor in nature as candidates would have been required to satisfy stringent vetting procedures. Existing Officers would have been dismissed had they committed an offence which undermined their position in the force. It was confirmed that in some areas of the country contracts were in place for security staff to carry out policing duties. TVP would closely monitor the success of these schemes.

A Member questioned the high number of child referrals made by TVP to SBC, where only 7% resulted in action being required by children's social care services, Ms Thornton acknowledged that this was a problem across the force and explained that when the police were called to a case of domestic violence, the police had to complete a form whenever children lived at the address and then notify the Council. Measures were in place to review the procedure and it was likely that a triage system would be used to identify those cases where social care intervention was required.

Ms Thornton responded to further concerns regarding the disparity between parking enforcement arrangements across boundaries, e.g Wexham Park Hospital. She advised that these offences had been decriminalised in some areas but not in others and her view was that this should happen across all areas. She acknowledged however that obstruction by vehicles would never be a top priority in policing.

Spt Humphrey responded to concerns regarding crime in the Colnbrook area and the change which would mean that the boundary would butt up to the Metropolitan (Met) Police area. There was a good liaison process in place with the Met and this would continue. The Committee was advised that many of the stolen vehicles abandoned in the Colnbrook area were from outside of the Borough.

A number of further questions were raised regarding the role of the new Police Commissioner and local accountability. Ms Thornton advised that the Chief Constable would be held to account by the Commissioner but nothing was set down in statute to say how this would be done and there were a number of practical areas that would need to be addressed.

A Member in attendance under Rule 30 raised the issue of child trafficking and vulnerable children in Slough. Ms Thornton requested that the Member forward the full detail of the issue and questions to her in writing so that she could have the opportunity to provide a comprehensive written response to the Member.

Resolved- That the Committee thank Sarah Thornton, Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police, and Supt Richard Humphrey, Local Police Area Commander, Slough, for their attendance, the presentation

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regarding the Strategy for Policing in the Thames Valley 2011-14 and their responses to submitted questions.

91. Project, Performance and Financial Reporting for 2011/12

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director (AD), Professional Services, introduced a report setting out the Council's overall performance covering the period up to and including 31st January, 2012.

Gold Projects

The AD highlighted that of the ten active gold projects, eight had been assessed to have an overall 'Green' status, and two as 'Amber'. Five projects had been evaluated at 'Amber' status for '*Issues and Risks*', and two at 'Amber' status for '*Timeline*'. None of the projects had been assessed as having a 'Red' status.

In the ensuing debate Members raised a number of concerns regarding the School Places in Slough Gold Project relating to the availability and location of places and the provision of statistics relating to attendance at schools inside and outside of the Borough. Clair Pyper, Strategic Director, Education & Children's Service advised that Slough had the 9th highest growing birthrate in the country and would increase by 28% between 2005 and 2015. The Director suggested that the subject of school places in Slough could be considered by the Education Panel at a future meeting and the Scrutiny Officer would take this forward.

A Member referred to the key issues of risk/ obstacles to progress within the Britwell Regeneration Project and asked for further explanation regarding the comments: 'unable to reach agreement with highest scoring Regeneration Tenderer preferred bidder – risk attenuated by pre-contract and the 'delay with delivering commercial housing due to economic downturn, / housing market down turn'. The AD advised that this question would be forwarded to the Interim AD, Environment & Regeneration for response.

Further questions were raised regarding future savings under the Transactional Services Project and the number of clients in receipt of personal budget/ direct payments. The Committee was advised that Officers had visited Chesterfield Council to discuss savings achieved by Arvato and for example savings would be achieved in Slough through payroll, printing and post services.

Performance Scorecard

The AD presented an update on the performance scorecard and responded to a number of questions.

Financial Reporting

Emma Foy, Interim Head of Central Finance, outlined the finance report and reminded the Committee that the Council's net revenue budget for 2011/12 was £105.1m and the Housing Services agreed net operating budget for this

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period was a surplus of £87k. The current forecast under spend for the 2011/12 general fund at the end of period 10 was £2.380m following the reallocation of resources. There was currently a forecast under spend of £161k for the Housing Revenue account. The Committee noted the month on month movement in variances within each directorate, emerging opportunities, staffing budgets and the capital monitoring position.

Resolved-

- i) That the current position regarding project management, the performance scorecard and financial performance be noted and
- ii) That the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel be recommended to undertake further scrutiny on the issue of school places in Slough.

92. Corporate Procurement Strategy 2012-2015

Jane Wood, Director of Community & Wellbeing introduced a report, setting out the Council's Draft Corporate Procurement Strategy 2012-2015, which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 12th March, 2012.

It was noted that the Corporate Procurement Team had undergone a restructure in 2011 to build new capacity into the procurement function and this would enable improvements to be made in the Council's procurement practice.

In response to a Member question regarding which weaknesses identified by the District Auditor had been corrected, the Director advised that the issues related to the delay in awarding contracts and that there were too many exemptions. These areas had been addressed. A Member was concerned that the Strategy should more fully reflect the Council's commitment to social responsibility. It was explained that this was reflected under sustainable procurement but it was acknowledged that it would be helpful to highlight this specifically in the strategy.

Resolved- That Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2012-2015 at its meeting on 12th March, 2012, subject to an addition to the Strategy to ensure that it reflects the Council's commitment regarding social responsibility.

93. Recommendation of the Health Scrutiny Panel- Appointment of Co-opted Member

The Committee was advised that at its meeting on 1st February, 2012, the Health Scrutiny Panel recommended that the membership of the Panel be amended to provide for the co-option of a member from the Slough LINK (non-voting). This was suggested in view of the number of changes to the National Health Service and the 'Shaping the Future' agenda. It was thought pertinent that a Member of the Slough LINK be formally appointed to the Panel to reflect the voice of the public.

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In practice, the Slough LINK had a number of Members who specialised in various aspects of health. It was agreed that the LINK would nominate one Member to attend each meeting, having regard to the nature of the agenda.

Resolved- That a member of the Slough LINK be appointed to the Health Scrutiny Panel as a non-voting co-optee with immediate effect (the representative at each meeting to be selected by LINK depending on the content of the meeting agenda).

94. Consideration of reports marked to be noted/for information

None received.

95. Forward Work Programme

It was suggested that the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel as an information report and a briefing would be provided for Members if required.

A Member expressed great concern regarding the number of 'Slough Sheds' that now existed in the town and she felt that these were not always fit for human habitation. It was agreed this matter be referred to the relevant Scrutiny Panel for consideration and a report on the findings could be submitted to the Committee at a later date.

Resolved- That the report be noted and that the subject of 'Slough Sheds' be referred to the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel for consideration of the concerns highlighted.

96. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the report be noted.

97. Date of Next Meeting- 10th April 2012

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10th April, 2012.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.35 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)