

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th April, 2013.

Present:- Councillors M S Mann (Chair), Minhas (arrived at 6.35pm), Nazir, O'Connor, Shah (arrived at 6.40pm) and Smith (Vice-Chair)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Plimmer

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Aujla and Bal

PART I

93. Declaration of Interest

None was declared.

94. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 5th March 2013

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 5th March 2013 be approved as a correct record.

95. Member Questions

In answer to a question, the Committee was informed that the difficulties that had arisen over the issue of bus passes at Landmark Place were due to an externally hosted system which is not controlled by Slough Borough Council. This was partly due to customer photographs having become corrupted on the system, but mostly due to a delay in the renewed bus passes being posted out to customers. Measures had been put in place to remedy the position and the delays in dealing with applicants had since been resolved.

96. Year 1 Progress on the Thames Valley Transactional Service Centre

The Committee considered an update on the first year's progress of the Transactional Services Centre Partnership and received a presentation from John Wybrant, Partnership Director with arvato.

The Partnership had gone live from 2nd April 2012 but a lot of important work had been commenced before that date in order to achieve a smooth transition. The presentation highlighted a number of the main features of the partnership work over the first 12 months, touching on the investment in new technology and staff training; service changes including the NNDR review and new Collection Strategy; performance issues including the agreement of new baseline KPIs; collaborative working with the Council and other local agencies; as well as service improvements and growth planned including the identification of new office accommodation.

The following points arose from answers to questions from Members:

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 09.04.13

- The savings arising from the partnership with arvato were explained, including those arising directly from the delivery of the service and those flowing from additional Council Tax income collected.
- Work was continuing on building the relationship with schools and the creation of a specific schools package to attract business from educational facilities such as schools and universities was expected to make an impact from September 2013.
- There was a continuing focus on reducing outstanding debt and the February 2013 total of £4.45m (of which a large proportion was raised in the month) compared favourably with previous totals of £7m to £9m.
- The improvement in the Council Tax collection rate (94.8% as at February 2013) continued and the year end figure was expected to hit (or be very close to) the target of 97%.
- The cashiers were the only directly employed arvato staff at Landmark Place although they supported Council staff at peak times such as on recent high level year end activity and changes to the benefits system. The Assistant Director Customer Services and ICT confirmed that the normal standard for replying to email enquiries was 5 days but this had worsened at the year end and the email backlog had risen to 200. Staff had been working additional hours to remedy the position and the backlog was reducing, but it was noted that unformatted email enquiries took longer to process and reply to than telephone enquiries.
- The format of the annual service plan, designed primarily as a working document for officers, was not the most helpful for the Committee and a new format/layout would be provided at the next review.

Resolved – (a) That progress made within the first year of the Transactional Services contract with arvato be noted.
(b) That an update report be presented to the Committee in six months' time.

97. Transactional Services - Phase II

The Committee considered a report containing an update on the progress made to date in exploring options for Phase II of the Transactional Services programme. This was a result of the Cabinet decision for officers to engage in negotiations with its Transactional Services provider arvato to include the additional services of Customer and ICT Services, with the view to further development of the partnership to offer and provide services to other public sector and third sector organisations.

The report set out details for both Customer Services and ICT Services in turn, of those functions which it was proposed to transfer to arvato for delivery back to the Council. For ICT it was proposed that the ownership, as well as the management, of all ICT assets is transferred to arvato and that these be provided back to the Council as part of a fully managed service. The scope of the services which would be retained was explained and the roles and responsibilities of the retained structure for ICT was detailed.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 09.04.13

Arising from Members' questions it was noted that the aim was to sign the contract for the transfer of services by the end of July in order to 'go live' by the end of August 2013. The contract would be coterminous with the original arvato partnership contract and would provide for the transfer of staff under the TUPE Regulations. The potential savings arising from the Phase II contract had yet to be fully quantified but the Committee recognised the advantages to be derived from the economies of scale that could be achieved by arvato, their substantial buying power in terms of investment in IT and the benefits from the wider growth of their business in Slough.

Resolved – That the progress made on exploring options for Phase II of the Transactional Services programme be noted.

98. Customer Service and Contact Strategy for 2013 - 2015

The Committee considered a report presenting a draft of the Council's Customer Service and Contact Strategy for 2013 – 2015, providing an opportunity for comment before it was reported to the Cabinet for ratification in June 2013.

The draft Strategy had been developed in partnership with services across the council and contained four key priorities:

- Understanding and empowering our customers
- Delivering efficiencies and effectiveness
- Building the capability and capacity of our staff
- Improving the way we deal with customer complaints

The Committee noted that arvato would be working jointly with the Council to deliver the Strategy once it had been approved. The importance of continuing the work on developing the range of ways for the public to contact and to transact with the Council was recognised, particularly in relation to the Council's website, to increase access, to accept on-line transactions, to extend the range of e-forms and encourage customers to self-serve at times and places convenient to them.

Resolved – That the draft Customer Service and Contact Strategy for 2013 – 2015 be noted without comment.

99. Corporate Plan 2013/14

The Committee considered a report presenting the most up to date information on the proposals being considered by the Cabinet in preparing the Corporate Plan for 2013/14, which set out the Council's priorities and key work areas for the forthcoming year. A new Corporate Plan had been drafted following development of the Slough Wellbeing Strategy (stating the overall priorities for the Borough agreed with partners) containing unchanged objectives (in terms of external services and internal functions) from 2012/13, summarised as follows:

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 09.04.13

- Achieve value for money
- Improve customer experience
- Deliver high quality services to meet local needs
- Develop new ways of working
- Deliver local and national change
- Develop a skilled and capable workforce

The Corporate Plan also contained sections about the vision for Slough and the Wellbeing Strategy, a plan for how the objectives would be delivered, and the Council's finances. The Cabinet would consider the draft Corporate Plan, together with any comments received, at a meeting on 24 April 2013.

Resolved – That the draft Corporate Plan 2013/14 be received without comment.

100. Cllr Plimmer Call-in: Leaseholder Annual Service Charge Statements

The Committee considered a written call-in request from Cllr Plimmer seeking a review of the process for issue of the Leaseholders Annual Service Charge Statement for 2013-14 and the current arrangements for the collection of service charges by the Revenues Department.

Cllr Plimmer was in attendance and explained the background to his call-in, referring to what he believed to be a lower than expected standard of service delivered by Housing Services towards leaseholders. Most recently this was illustrated by the issue of the Annual Service Charge for Leaseholder 2013-14 dated 19th February, posted out by 2nd class mail on 22nd February and received by leaseholders on 26th February 2013. The deadline for leaseholders to respond and apply to pay by monthly instalments was 28th February, only two days later. He queried the delay in sending out the Annual Service Charge Statements, the reason why a standing instruction from leaseholders to pay by monthly instalments could not be accepted, and the lack of any detail on the calculation of the figure for responsive repairs carried out.

The Committee was informed that it had not been possible in the time available to provide a comprehensive officer response to the issues raised in the call-in.

Resolved – That a review of the process for issuing the Leaseholder Annual Service Charge Statement and arrangements for the collection of service charges be carried out, for report to the Committee in July 2013.

101. Annual Scrutiny Report 2012/13

Sarah Forsyth, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the draft Annual Scrutiny Report for 2012/13, which was due for presentation at the meeting of the Council to be held on 23rd April 2013. The Committee considered the report and confirmed that no amendments or additions were necessary.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 09.04.13

Resolved – That the draft Annual Scrutiny Report be endorsed for presentation to the Council.

102. Foxborough Task and Finish Group Findings

The Committee considered the final report and findings of the Task and Finish Group entitled “Foxborough Ward: Profile of Deprivation”. The report looked into the detail behind the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 results for the four Lower Super Output Areas in the Foxborough ward to see what could be done to improve their rankings for the future.

The Group had identified the primary areas of concern, based on IMD information, as:

- Crime
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Employment

and had sought additional data and details of actions already being taken to address these issues.

The Group acknowledged with thanks the in-depth study carried out by the Task and Finish Group, supported by the Officers, and endorsed the six recommendations put forward. Members made suggestions in relation to the closure of Langley Police Station and the availability of the IT Centre at Byron House, Common Road, Langley, which could possibly be picked up with the actions arising from the recommendations.

Resolved – to endorse the following recommendations:

- 1) that the Slough Borough Council representative on the Police and Crime Panel and members of the Safer Slough Partnership ensure that the levels of crime in Slough are accurately articulated through their work to ensure adequate weight is given to the issues affecting the area;
- 2) with a number of gating requests for Foxborough unable to progress due to the activity taking place on a public right of way, that the Cabinet direct the Community Safety Team to develop an alternative option for tackling anti-social behaviour in Foxborough (which could also be used in other areas where similar issues have arisen in terms of anti-social behaviour taking place on public rights of way);
- 3) that the Cabinet direct the Employability Development Team to investigate the options for increasing the number of Job Clubs in the East of the Borough, currently only served by the once a week Club at Langley Library; and
- 4) that the Slough Wellbeing Board be asked to consider reviewing levels of health deprivation in Lower Super Output Area EO1016490 and that its findings are provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 09.04.13

Resolved –

- 5) that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of Neighbourhood Action Groups in Slough, looking at how many are in operation, their levels of activity, and what support is available to them; and
- 6) that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the effectiveness of Job Clubs in Slough in the spring 2014, and in particular review the impact of opening the Langley Job Club to more than just Lone Parents from 2013.

103. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the Members' attendance record be noted.

104. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 4th June 2013.

As this was the last meeting of the municipal year, the Committee passed a vote of thanks to Sarah Forsyth, Scrutiny Officer, and the Democratic Services Officer(s) for their support throughout the year.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)