

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 9th July, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (from 7.22pm, Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bains, Bal, N Holledge, Rana and Usmani

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Malik

PART I

7. Declaration of Interest

Councillor Bal declared that a family member worked at Slough Borough Council and arvato.

8. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 17th June 2015

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 17th June 2015 be approved as a correct record.

9. Member Questions

None received.

10. Thames Valley Transactional Services - April 2014 to March 2015

Details of Year 3 Performance for Transactional Services for the period April 2014 to March 2015 were outlined. Kevin Hales, Site Director, highlighted the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the following areas:

Revenues and Benefits

- Target of 96% Council Tax collection rate achieved which had resulted in £1.8 million in additional revenue for the Council.
- Business Rates had exceeded the annual collection rate targets with an extra £400,000 collected.
- Introduction of two Welfare Officers - over £700,000 additional benefit awards to local residents as a direct result of their work.
- Issued 2015/16 Council Tax Bills and Benefits letters in the same envelope reducing customer bureaucracy and improving ease of use.
- The Self Serve System had gone live, enabling customers to undertake a number of transactions on the Council's website – including Council Tax Details, Direct Debit and E-Billing Sign Up and correspondence review.

Transactional HR and Payroll

- 100% of KPIs achieved
- Successful implementation of new standards required by the 2014 Pension Scheme.

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- Health and Safety incident report project for Professional HR complete.

Finance

- Consistent high performance on AR debt collections allowed new increased KPI targets to be agreed from July 2014.
- Implementation of 'No P.O. No Pay' policy and roll out of e-learning module for client managers.
- Removal of payments by cheque to all commercial suppliers to the Council.
- Successful completion of annual rent increase letter and quarterly statements for tenants.
- Implementation of Automated Payment Machines at Landmark Place (LMP) and other local access points across the Borough. The self service kiosks at LMP contributed to the collection of £120,000 during the first six weeks.

Customer Services

- Increase in the number of telephone calls answered within 30 seconds from 38.5% to 52.8%.
- Number of customers served within 30 minutes increased from 53.4% to 70.6%
- Successful restructure of the Customer Service Centre to support the relocation of the Contact Centre.
- Improved response times to emails and e-forms through the enquiries@slough.gov.uk

In the ensuing discussion a number of questions were raised, including:

- *What measures were put in place to mitigate peaks in service?* It was explained that peaks and troughs in demand for services were inevitable but a number of measures had been implemented to mitigate the impact on service delivery, including increasing the number of self service kiosks and receiving prior warning from SBC of letters being sent out on a specific issue eg council tax bills; in order to allow the teams to make the necessary adjustments.
- *Details regarding Monitoring Customer Feedback.* It was confirmed that customer feedback, including complaint forms, was regularly monitored and although the details were not included within the annual report they would be circulated to Committee Members.
- *Challenges facing arvato.* It was noted that IT provision remained the greatest challenge for arvato as some of the infrastructure required for SBC was not fit for purpose and required further development.
- *How to improve Direct Debit Take up.* A variety of communication methods had been implemented to increase the number of households

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paying council tax by Direct Debit, including press releases, correspondence sent with council tax bills and a Direct Debit Take Up campaign. It was noted that following a six week campaign, an additional 1300 individuals had signed up to pay their council tax via direct debit and that approximately 60% of residents now paid via this method.

- *Clarification was sought regarding KPI L11, Council Tax arrears collection as the target KPI rate was noted as 'to be confirmed'.* Members were informed that figures regarding this KPI were not included within the annual report as performance monitoring in relation to this was not required until the next couple of years. It was noted however that the KPI target was 98.5% over the duration of the contract.
- *What strategies were being employed to reduce the current waiting time of thirty minutes for customers to be seen?* A number of service improvements had been implemented to streamline processes and secure a step change in performance. These included the new online self service which would allow residents a broad range of facilities including ability to make payments, updates to personal details and sign up for direct debit.
- *Concerns highlighted by Internal Auditors regarding Phase 2 KPI's and achieving Value For Money.* The Strategic Director of Customer and Community Services explained that the audit had been carried out prior to the KPIs having been agreed and monitored. It was anticipated that in the next three to six months the KPIs would be assessed as green.
- *Civic Responsibility/ Involvement with the Community.* The Committee were informed that arvato remained committed to its civic responsibilities and regularly participated in local initiatives to help support the Borough. Key activities included raising funds for local a local charity and investing resources in facilitating workshops in schools relating to poverty awareness. arvato continued to be engaged with Slough Aspire and more recently sponsored the Slough Business Awards 2015. It was agreed that a report detailing arvato's work and projects within the community would be submitted to the January committee meeting.
- *The current position regarding write off's.* It was explained that arvato made recommendations regarding write offs to the Assistant Director, Finance and Audit, who as the Section 151 Officer made decisions regarding write offs.
- *arvato's role in supporting apprentices.* It was brought to Members attention that arvato remained committed to supporting young people through the apprenticeships and NVQ scheme. In 2014, arvato retained 50% of the apprentice cohort in full time roles with others finding employment or full time education elsewhere. Over the lifetime

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of the contract arvato would employ and train a total of 117 apprentices.

Resolved – That details of the Thames Valley Transactional Services Report for the period April 2014 to March 2015 be noted.

11. Update on Externalisation of Children's Services

The Strategic Director of Customer and Community Services provided an update on the externalisation of Children's Services. Following the appointment of the Department of Education's (DfE) support services team in January 2015, a governance structure was set up to manage the transition of services.

Members were informed that the model of the organisation was a private company, limited by guarantee with no share capital. However, the long term aspiration was for the company to convert to a Community Interest Company (CIC) but this would be a matter for the Children Services organisation (CSO). Details of the Fit for Purpose Schedule were outlined which highlighted the matters that were outstanding and needed to be met prior to the provisional go live date of September 2015.

Clarification was sought regarding the Council's responsibilities following the transfer of services to the CSO and how long the organisation would be set up for. It was explained that by contracting with the CSO the Council would retain all its legal obligations for the statutory duties. However, the Secretary of State had stated that the services would be 'out of Council control' and therefore the Council may have limited control over how the children's social care functions that were delivered or in being able to hold to account the CSO for any failings. It was noted that the CSO had initially been established for a period of six years and there was no definitive end date.

Concern was expressed as to how the Council could hold the CSO accountable. Committee Members were informed that performance would be monitored against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and ultimately referral could be made to the Minister if targets were not being achieved.

Members queried the financial costs associated with the transfer of services. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that the Memorandum of Understanding confirmed that the Council would be reimbursed for all costs. The Council had been advised of a cap on costs of £615,000 which was expected to cover more than the Council's project and professional services costs. Although Council officers recorded time currently had a value of approximately £200,000 areas of concern remained including accommodation fit out, ICT set up costs and client management costs. It was noted that the CSO would be based at Ground Floor West at St Martins Place.

A Member asked for information relating to the recruitment and retention of staff under the CSO. It was explained that staff numbers outlined within the report were likely to remain unchanged, with permanent members of staff

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being TUPE'd across to the CSO. The Council had agreed to an Open pension Scheme to enable existing public sector employees to move across to the CSO without jeopardising their current Local Government Pension Scheme pensions. Members were informed that it would be for the CSO to decide whether to continue to use agency staff and or consultants.

The Committee agreed that the necessary arrangements be made for the CSO to replicate the governance reporting structure adopted by arvato, with monitoring reports being submitted to the Committee on a bi-annual basis.

Resolved – That the update on Externalisation of Children's Services be noted.

12. Five Year Plan - Future Approach of Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Officer outlined details relating to the proposed scrutiny approach to be adopted regarding monitoring of the outcomes contained within the Council's Five Year Plan. To ensure that the workload was spread in as relevant and efficient manner as possible, the outcomes contained within the 'Enabling and Preventing' theme would be divided between the three Scrutiny Panels.

Resolved –

- a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee retains the responsibility for scrutinising the themes 'Changing, Retaining and Growing' and 'Using Resources Wisely'.
- b) That the theme 'Enabling and Preventing' is sub-divided and delegated as follows:
 - Slough will be one of the safest places to live in the Thames Valley – Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.
 - Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life choices – Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel.
 - More people will take responsibility and manage their own health, care and support needs – Health Scrutiny Panel.
- c) That the schedule for scrutinising these themes discussed in section 5.8 (namely, Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look at each of its two themes once every six months, the Panels to do likewise for their outcomes) be adopted.

13. Town Centre Car Park Task and Finish Group - Decisions by Cabinet

Members were informed that the Town Centre Car Parking Task and Finish Group's recommendations were considered at the Cabinet meeting in June 2015. The decisions taken by Cabinet were noted and it was agreed that an

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update on the implementation of the recommendations would be reported to the Committee in six months time.

Resolved – That the Cabinet decisions taken on 22 June 2015 with regard to the Town Centre Car Park Task and Finish Group be noted and an update provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting January 2016.

14. Forward Work Programme

Details of the Work Programme for the municipal year were outlined.

Resolved - That details of the Forward Work programme be noted subject to the following additions:

- November 2015: Scrutiny of 'Changing, Retaining and Growing' theme.
- November 2015: Invite Representative of the Children's Trust to the meeting.
- January 2016: Town Centre Car Park task and Finish Group - Update on recommendations agreed by Cabinet
- February 2016: Scrutiny of 'Using resources Wisely' theme

15. Attendance Record

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

16. Date of Next Meeting - 10th September 2015

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10th September 2015.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.36 pm)