

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 2nd July, 2009.

Present:- Councillors Mann, Basharat (from 6.45 p.m.), Coad, Davis,
A S Dhaliwal (until 8.30 p.m.), Pantelic and Walsh (from 6.45 p.m.).

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Grewal, Matloob, Munkley,
Parmar, Plimmer, Shine and Swindlehurst.

PART I

11. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Davis declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 (Slough Town Football Club) as he was a supporter of the Club.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8th June, 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. Membership of the Health Scrutiny Panel

The Committee was advised that Councillor Long had submitted her resignation from the Health Scrutiny Panel and the Conservative Group had nominated Councillor Dhillon in her place.

Resolved – That Councillor Dhillon be appointed to the Health Scrutiny Panel.

14. Slough Town Football Club

The Assistant Director, Property Services, the Chairman of Slough Town Football Club, Steve Easterbrook and the Managing Director of New Business at Paradigm Housing Group, Iqram Haq, made a presentation to the Committee setting out details of an outline proposal received from the Club and Paradigm Housing involving the construction of a community football stadium and a residential development on the site of the former Arbour Vale School. The proposal was that the residential land would be sold freehold to Paradigm. The available remainder of the site would be simultaneously leased by the Council to the Club (through a Trust or appropriate vehicle) for a term of 125 years. This would be linked to a contract between the three parties for the building of the new club facility so as to protect the Council's interests in the project.

The proposal comprised 81 residential units with up to 100% affordable housing with the potential for 19 further dwellings if the site of the West Wing was included. The offer made was for a capital receipt to the Council of £2.4m (rising to a minimum £3.5m if the West Wing was included). A new stadium for Slough Town Football Club would be constructed with a capacity of up to 3,000. It was noted that a formal grant application was to be made by

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the Club to the Football Association, Sport England and other relevant bodies and there was an expectation by the Club of a capital grant of some £500,000. It was noted that the stadium included community facilities and external pitches including a floodlit all-weather games pitch. There would also be halls of residence included within the development which could be used by a range of different user groups. It was noted that the Arbour Vale site was located in the Green Belt and as such special circumstances would need to be shown as part of any planning application submission in order for the proposals to be considered acceptable. Accordingly, there were far higher risks than usual of the application being "called-in" by the Secretary of State. However, the proposers were nevertheless confident that they could demonstrate such special circumstances that would allow permission to be ultimately granted and advice received suggested that the inclusion of aspects of the development which provided direct community benefit may have a positive impact on the prospects of success. However, there was no guarantee that such benefits would provide a sufficient case to allow for both the stadium and housing development.

On completion of the presentation, Members raised the following issues in the subsequent debate:-

- A Member queried what level of attendances at the stadium would be required for profitability to be achieved. Mr Easterbrook responded that they would expect at least a 50% increase in their current attendances to some 450 should the Club relocate into the town.
- Members raised a range of issues concerning the traffic, noise, parking and similar issues arising out of a football stadium, particularly on match days. However, Officers advised that all such issues would comprise part of the normal planning process and traffic and environmental impact studies would need to be undertaken as part of that process.
- In answer to a question, Mr Easterbrook commented that he believed that, given the stadium's close location to the town centre, many people would travel on foot from the railway or bus stations and, where a large crowd was anticipated, the Club would envisage laying on a shuttle service from the town centre. Mr Easterbrook also confirmed that the Club would be looking at green transport solutions including the possibility of supporters who used public transport being given a discount on their match tickets.
- Concern was expressed by a Member at the potential loss of the West Wing Arts facility and she drew particular attention to the report on the Council's performance indicators later on the agenda where involvement in the arts by Slough residents was below the national average. She feared that the loss of this facility would have a further detrimental effect. Officers responded that two options were being presented, with or without the West Wing, and it would be a decision for the authority as to whether the facility was retained.
- Members queried how confident the Football Club was that it would receive the grant allocation anticipated of up to £500,000 and whether any contingency plan had been put in place should such grant funding

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not be achieved. Mr Easterbrook replied that there was no contingency plan as such but they were extremely confident that such a grant would be forthcoming, given that similar schemes around the country had attracted grant funding of this nature. Unfortunately however, no confirmation would be given as to funding until after the approval of the planning application.

- A Member asked whether the site would enable expansion of the Football Stadium should this be required in the future and was advised that there was sufficient capacity to expand up to Conference level requirements.
- A Member asked whether, if St Joseph's School did not wish to use the facilities on site, they would be made available for other local schools to use. He also sought clarification as to whether any access to facilities was required over the St Joseph's site. Officers confirmed that St Joseph's land was a completely separate site and no access was required across it. In addition, the Club would be more than happy for other schools to utilise the facilities when they were not being used by St Joseph's.
- Several Councillors sought assurances that, if the Club failed at some future point, the Council would not be required to provide funding to assist it. Given the problems with the former site in Wexham Road, any contractual arrangement needed to be completely watertight and to protect the Council's interests fully. The Deputy Borough Solicitor confirmed the proposed legal arrangements, stressing that the Football Club would not own the lease themselves. This would be held by a Trust or similar body and there would be a requirement for the land only to be used for football or sports purposes. She confirmed that lessons had been learned from previous experiences and the Council's position would be fully protected.
- Assurances were also sought as to how the Club would manage the situation should the anticipated revenues not be forthcoming. Mr Easterbrook stated that the Club would tailor its expenditure to the revenues available. However, independent forecasts had been prepared and he believed that the various revenue streams available would be sufficient for the Club to function and grow.
- A Member was concerned that the facilities would only be used by a minority of young people in the town, given that not everyone was interested in football. He asked what would be offered to other young people who did not want to play in organised teams or were not interested in football. Mr Easterbrook responded that a community stadium had multiple uses and what was provided depended very much on what the community wanted. He hoped that whatever was provided would meet perceived local need. He also commented that the Club would be looking for corporate sponsorship from local companies to assist the more disadvantaged young people in the area.
- A Member referred to the previous proposal to include a hotel in the scheme which would have provided a revenue stream for the Club and asked how this income would now be generated. He was advised that income would be obtained through grants and through a range of revenue schemes including the halls of residence. Given the level at

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which the Club was currently playing, the players themselves would only receive travel expenses.

- Mr Easterbrook also made reference to the football development plan, a copy of which had been placed in the Members' Room. This showed a structure for involving young people in Slough from toddlers right through to under 18s and it was very much the Club's ambition to get as many young people as possible involved.
- A Member asked whether it would not have been possible to provide a gym or similar facilities in the development. Officers commented that, given that this was a Green Belt site, there were limitations on the development that could take place. However, all options were being kept under review.
- A Member asked whether there would be facilities provided for girls, given that many of them were not interested in football. Mr Easterbrook stated that the stadium would provide multi-functional facilities including those which may be of more interest to girls such as dance and aerobics. The Club was very much relying on a steer from the community as to the facilities that were required.
- Clarification was sought as to who would be the members of the Trust body. Officers stated that this was a matter for the proposers but that the Council would certainly expect to have observer status on the body. However, full membership of such a Trust would carry certain liabilities which Members needed to be cautious of.

On conclusion of the questioning, Members indicated that they supported the proposals in principle but that there were concerns about the potential loss of the West Wing Arts Centre, given the relatively low participation by Slough residents in arts activities.

Resolved – That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the proposals in principle, subject to the retention of the West Wing Arts Centre if at all possible.

15. Presentation - Update on Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Assistant Director, Transformational Change, Improvement & Development made a presentation to the Committee explaining that the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) was a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examined how well Councils were working together with other public bodies to meet the needs of the people they served and comprised a joint assessment made by a group of six independent watchdogs. There would be two assessments, an area assessment and an organisational assessment and Councils and partners would need to show that they understood their communities (and in particular the needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups) and created local priorities that reflected those groups' needs and aspirations; that they sought to improve their customers' experience of services and tailored services to local needs; and assessments would be made publicly available every year and would provide an annual snapshot of the quality of life in the area. The key difference from

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the former Comprehensive Performance Assessment was that CAA was an assessment of the whole area and not just the performance of the Council.

On completion of the presentation, the following issues were raised:-

- Clarification was sought as to how the Council would deal with partner organisations that were not performing well. The Officer responded that the CAA process did present a significant challenge for all parties but that the structures were in place to deliver the required results. The Performance Development Groups (PDGs) of the Local Strategic Partnership had a role in gathering the necessary evidence required and were fully engaged in the process.
- A Member asked whether there were sufficient resources within the Borough Council at the present time to manage the new process. The Officer confirmed that the resources were adequate at the present time but that the situation would need to be kept under review.
- The Officer was asked whether he felt that the new arrangements would be an improvement on the previous CPA. He commented that one positive aspect of the new arrangements was that authorities could continue to submit evidence right up until the time of the final judgement. However, it was as yet unclear whether the new arrangements would be a "lighter touch" regime than the previous one.
- Members again raised concerns about the role of elected Councillors in the process of setting local targets, etc. Officers confirmed that Members were previously involved in setting the LAA targets, along with other partners. It was noted that the Lead Auditor would be meeting Cabinet Members in September and it was proposed to ask him to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at some point to feed back the findings. It was noted that the role of Members was an issue that had been previously flagged up by the Committee and was to be reported on later in the year.
- A Member asked how Members could ensure that performance reporting to the Committee was more timely so that it had more current data and more of an indication of likely performance in the coming quarter. The Officer commented that a great deal of work was being undertaken at the moment to provide more timely information for Members although there would always be a time lag between the end of an accounting period and when the information was ready to report. However, it was hoped to keep this to a minimum.

Resolved – That the current position be noted and that the concerns expressed by the Committee be taken into account by Officers.

16. **Review of the Council's Grant Funding and Other Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector**

The Assistant Director, Economic Development & Inclusion presented a report providing Members with an update on the review of grant funding and support to the voluntary and community sector. The review would consider how funding and commissioning was organised and would enable the

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development of a new, more open, transparent and efficient Council-wide system, resulting in more equitable and effective systems for funding and commissioning the voluntary and community sector. He would also develop funding priorities and criteria in line with the Sustainable Community Strategy and enable the commissioning of Council services to become more accessible for the voluntary and community sector. It also aimed to improve communication and understanding between the Council and the sector. It was intended to report to the Cabinet on the proposed review in late 2009 and then go out to consultation with interested parties with a view to implementing the final review by March 2010.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to have a dedicated Officer for this service and also to ensure that all sources of external funding for the Council were accessed. The Officer confirmed that the job description of an existing Officer was currently under review with a view to them having a role in accessing grant funding for the town as a whole.

Members requested to be provided with full details of the grants made to voluntary and community organisations each year and Officers confirmed that this information was available and would be provided. However, the list of the grants made by the voluntary sector unit was not fully comprehensive in that other funding and help in kind was made available to the sector by other departments of the Council and work was ongoing to ensure that all of this information was held in one place.

Members stressed the need to ensure that the Council took advantage of as many sources of grant funding as was possible and the Officer confirmed that the current review would be looking at this issue.

Resolved – That the report and the current review be noted and that Members of the Committee be provided of the full details of the grants made to the voluntary and community sector in Slough.

17. IT Resilience and Business Continuity

The Strategic Director of Resources and the Head of IS&T presented a report setting out the need to urgently address the relocation of the Council's computer room as part of the Council's accommodation strategy. It was explained that the current computer room was essentially an office space that had been assigned to accommodate computer equipment and, despite much work undertaken using new technologies, the room was inefficient and the floors could not be raised to enable proper air flow. Because of this, the room was costly and difficult to keep cool and was operating close to its maximum potential. There had been a number of disruptions and loss of availability of IT over the past two years for a number of reasons and it was clear that the current situation could not continue. A report was therefore presented setting out options for addressing the situation, the preferred option being to engage a third party to host the Council's computer room. Discussions had taken place with Sungard who had a long term record in providing such services and were competitively priced. However, this would require the removal of

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the service to a site in Docklands although the one off costs of networking and moving to the new accommodation would be the same for all locations.

The Officers also presented information on the IT Department's current work programme for Members' information.

Whilst supporting the proposals to move the Council's computer facilities off site, there were significant concerns expressed at any proposal to move them out of the Slough area entirely. It was pointed out that a number of options had been looked at in the Slough area but none had been satisfactory to date. Members commented that, although the amount of employment which this would generate was relatively small, it would be far preferable to use a Slough-based business if at all possible.

Officers commented that they would continue to seek the best solution for the authority and that the package proposed by Sungard was the best available at the present time. However, it would continue to seek alternative solutions in Slough.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that the Cabinet be recommended that Officers endeavour to relocate the Council's computer room to a site in Slough if at all possible.

18. Performance and Financial Reporting for 2009/10

The Strategic Director of Resources and the Assistant Director, Transformational Change, Improvement and Development presented a report highlighting the Council's overall performance, focusing on performance management, debt recovery and the revenue monitoring position. It also provided the latest Human Resources statistics.

Members raised the following issues:-

- An update was requested of the Council's harmonisation scheme and Officers confirmed that they were continuing to attempt to implement it in conjunction with the Trade Unions. However, the point was now being reached where it may not be possible to achieve the sign-off of the Unions and it may be necessary to impose a deadline on them, after which the scheme would be implemented.
- Members indicated that, given the large amount of information presented in the Balanced Scorecard, it would be preferable in future if Officers reported on an "exception reporting" basis, only providing details of those indicators which were underperforming or gave cause for concern and this was agreed.
- A range of indicators were highlighted by Members as being "red" and Officers were asked to ensure that these were closely monitored and reported back to the Committee at future meetings with details of action being taken to improve the position.
- Particular concern was expressed at the poor performance at MyCouncil in respect of queuing and telephone answering. Members

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indicated that this had been an ongoing problem and sought assurances that action was being taken by Officers to improve the situation. The Strategic Director commented that a range of measures were currently being implemented to improve matters and that he would be happy to bring back a report in about six months' time when an improvement would hopefully be in evidence. It was noted that staff turnover was one of the issues that gave rise to problems as there were few opportunities for advancement within the staffing structure.

- In response to a question from a Member, Officers undertook to provide additional information for her about the "partnership perspective".
- A Member expressed concern at the level of response to complaints about People 1st. It was confirmed by one of the Board Members that this had already been flagged up as an issue and a report requested to the Board.

On completion of the questioning, the Chair commented that mitigating the effects of the recession was the prime concern of the Council at the present time but that it was important to keep an eye on the future economy. He suggested that the Council should be developing and communicating a regular and updated story about the impact the recession was having on the area, the steps the Council and its partners were taking to respond to that impact, their vision for the future and the action they were taking to work towards that vision. He requested the submission of a report on how the Council and its partners were intending to use the powers contained within the Sustainable Communities Act and wellbeing powers to tackle this issue.

The Committee also heard a presentation from the Assistant Director, Economic Development & Inclusion on the effect of the current recession on the town, including levels of unemployment and highlighting the work that the Council and partners were undertaking to mitigate the worse effects. He commented that particular concerns were the issues of long term unemployment and the increasing number of young people who were possibly moving into long term unemployment.

Resolved – That the report and presentation be noted and that a report be presented to the Committee on the use of the Sustainable Communities Act and wellbeing powers as referred to above.

19. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its work programme for future meetings. It was suggested that, given the current deterioration in performance at MyCouncil, it would be preferable for a report to be brought to the Committee at an earlier stage and it was agreed that this should be considered at the November meeting, if possible.

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20. Mr Andrew Blake-Herbert

The Committee paid tribute to the Strategic Director of Resources, Mr Andrew Blake-Herbert, who was leaving the authority shortly and thanked him for his considerable contribution to the work of the Committee.

21. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday, 3rd September, 2009.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 9.40 p.m.)