

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 19th November, 2009.**

**Present:-** Councillors Mann (Chair), Coad, Cryer, A S Dhaliwal and Walsh (from 6.43pm)

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Parmar, S K Dhaliwal and Matloob

### **PART 1**

#### **45. Chair's Announcement**

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, wished to place on record their appreciation and thanks to Kevin Barrett, Democratic Services Manager, for his valuable contribution to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the years and wished him well for the future.

#### **46. Declarations of Interest.**

Councillor Cryer declared a Personal Interest on Agenda Item 6 – Update on Grants to External Bodies – as his wife was Chair of the Slough Council for Voluntary Service.

#### **47. Minutes**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 15th October, 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **48. Presentation - Place Survey**

The Local Strategic Partnership Manager presented to Committee Members the results of the Place Survey 2008/2009. Members were reminded that this was a statutory survey that had to be undertaken by every local authority in England and was carried out on a biennial basis. Members were informed that the survey provided a set of national indicators that were common to all areas and replaced the previous Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) survey. The LSP Manager stated that the methodology used to conduct the survey was a postal survey with a target for each local authority to achieve a minimum of 1,100 completed surveys. It was noted that between 25<sup>th</sup> September to 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 a mailer pack was sent out to 4,500 addresses which had been chosen at random. Members were advised that a 35% response rate had been achieved which was an improvement on the previous survey where 28% completed results were received.

Amongst the highlights in the presentation were the following:-

- Community Cohesion and the Local Area: Satisfaction with the local area had increased significantly since the 2006 indicator from 52% to 64%. 44% agreed that people not treating each other with respect and consideration was a problem. However, this was significantly lower

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than the 2006 BVPI indicator of 62% and represented a major improvement.

- Usage of Services Supported or Provided by the Council: It was noted that figures for this indicator were consistent with the average figures for England.
- Satisfaction with Services Supported or Provided by the Council – Environment: Satisfaction was highest for indicators relating to refuse collection. It was highlighted that satisfaction with parks and open spaces was well below the all England average and stood at 56% which was a marked decline since 2006 indicator where this service had been rated at 63%.
- Satisfaction with the Council: It was noted that whilst the indicator for satisfaction with the council had reduced from 39% to 30% this was not an issue that was particular to Slough. Comparative data highlighted that this decline was a national trend and could be attributed to the recession. It was also clarified that individuals were less likely to be satisfied with the Council if they were not satisfied with the services within their own local area.

The LSP Manager stated that a number of conclusions that could be made from the survey, which included:-

- National Indicator 5 - satisfaction with the local area and National Indicator 23 - proportion of people not treating each other with respect and consideration had both shown improvement
- Data relating to satisfaction with park and open spaces, theatres/concert halls and museums and galleries were all below the England average. It was noted however that generally cultural facilities were not seen as important to residents of Slough.
- Declines since 2006 in satisfaction with the Council and perceptions that it provides value for money reflected the national picture.
- Although there was evidence that ensuring residents can influence decisions had a positive benefit, care must be taken to ensure that residents were not burdened with involvement in decisions that they were not interested in.
- Suggestion that more could be done to ensure residents were informed by local public service.
- Whilst improvement in anti-social behaviour had been noted, this remained an area of high concern amongst Slough residents.
- Evidence existed that white residents felt a lack of respect and consideration was a bigger problem than other ethnic groups and that they were also the least likely group (by ethnicity) to feel proud of living in Slough.

Members were informed that work was being carried out to address the issues raised by the Place Survey and included a delivery chain workshop scheduled in December 2009 to capture partner actions with regard to addressing the issue of community cohesion. Other events scheduled were an Inter Faith week and a series of diversity days early in 2010. To improve

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the indicator regarding satisfaction with local area this was being addressed through neighbourhood working and included two pilot projects that were being undertaken in Manor Park and Colnbrook, with further work being planned in the Chalvey area.

The LSP Manager commented that a more detailed analysis of the survey results would be undertaken to identify all the issues that needed to be addressed prior to the next survey and that once this was completed, a plan would be produced and presented to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members raised the following issues in the subsequent questioning and debate:-

- A Member queried that when comparing data with other local authorities why were the same authorities not used each time. The LSP Manager responded by stating that Slough was being compared to those local authorities that were considered to have the same demographic make-up as Slough.
- A Member asked as to how the questions in the survey were formulated. It was noted that the same questionnaire was used by all local authorities and would remain the same for any subsequent surveys carried out in order ensure consistency when comparing data from previous surveys.
- A Member commented that following the completion of the survey, a number of significant improvements had been made to the play areas in the Baylis and Stoke Ward and it was therefore anticipated that there would be an improvement to this indicator in the next survey.
- The accuracy of the results of the survey were questioned in that the questionnaire was sent out in English and it may have been sent to households where English was not the first language. The LSP Manager stated that whilst these were valid concerns, the survey was formulated by Central Government for all local authorities to use. It was also explained that the survey had been sent out to households on a random selection basis.
- A Member requested that the responses received be broken down by wards to be provided. It was agreed that this information would be distributed to Members of the Committee following the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Local Strategic Partnership Manager for his comprehensive presentation. It was requested that in future, presentation slides be distributed with the agenda to allow members sufficient opportunity to consider the information prior to the meeting.

### **49. Performance and Financial Monitoring for 2009/10.**

The Strategic Director for Improvement and Development highlighted the Council's overall performance from delivery of service to financial management. A number of areas of significant improvement were highlighted and included :-

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- **Average queue time at My Council** – Performance had improved significantly from 50 minutes average waiting time at the end of financial year 08/09 to 19 minutes as at Quarter 2 of the current financial year. Members were advised that this exceeded the target of 30 minutes and was partially due to the fact that processes had been reviewed to maximise advisors productivity in ensuring queue awareness whilst improving customer service standards.
- **Issues resolved Live at My Council** – Performance was increasing and was judged to be at 89% for Quarter 2, therefore exceeding the target of 80%. Revised and updated frequently asked questions on the system had resulted in an improved service to customers with more queries resolved directly by the customer service advisors at the first point of contact.
- **Serious acquisitive crime rate** – It was noted that this indicator had reduced by 29% compared to the same reporting period last year. This equated to a reduction from 21.32 crimes per 1000 population to 15.1 crimes per 1000. This was seen as a significant achievement given the expected impact of the recession. It was stated that a number of key operations / actions had contributed to the sustained improvement and included the Dob-a-Robber Scheme and an increase in marked police patrols in hotspot areas.
- **Achievement of 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths** - Provisional 2009 Outturn of 61.7% was a considerable improvement from the 2008 figure of 59.7% and was well above the national average of the 49.7%. It was also noted that Slough was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> nationally out of 152 local authorities.

Information relating to areas that required improvement was also brought to Members attention and included:

- **Percent of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days**  
The implementation of the I-procurement system had resulted in some delays and further work and training had now been undertaken to ensure continuous improvement.
- **The number of adult attendances at all local Leisure Centres combined with participation in all sports development activities from SBC and Slough Community Leisure**  
It was reported that performance for the first six months suggested that the end of year target would not be met and that a downward trend had been noted from September 08. Members were informed that Slough Community Leisure was constantly reviewing packages it marketed to the public in a bid to improve attendance and membership. A Member queried as to whether the facilities offered by the sports centres catered for the needs of the public and whether the fees charged by the leisure centres were competitive enough to attract customers. Members were informed that Slough Community Leisure ran the leisure centres on behalf of the Council and that they set their own fees. It was agreed that the Commissioner for Community & Leisure be invited to attend

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the next meeting of the scrutiny committee to clarify the issues and explain what input the Council had, if any, with regard to the pricing policy at the leisure centres.

- **Adult participation in sport**

It was reported that Slough was performing at the bottom end of the lowest quartile nationally with regard to adult participation in sport. To address this specific issue the Slough Sport and Physical Activity Forum had developed an action plan (adopted by the Slough Active Team) to encourage wider participation across all age groups. Actions taken to date included: a successful bid for funding to increase gym membership, a targeted marketing campaign to increase frequency of use of sporting facilities and promotion of free swimming for children and those aged over sixty.

(Councillor Coad left the meeting)

The Strategic Director for Improvement and Development reported on the Council's financial position and stated that the net revenue budget for 2009/10 was £102.6m. However, it was reported that there was currently a projected overspend for this period of £860k. It was noted that this position needed to be addressed against the following emerging issues:-

- **Adult Social Care / Changes to mental Health Provision** – Members were advised that a number of changes were being proposed relating to mental health care provision for Slough residents; namely the transfer of mental health provision from Slough to Prospect park Hospital in Reading and the suspension of plans to provide for new mental health services at Upton Park Hospital in Slough. A Member expressed serious concern with regard to these proposals, stating that mental health care required a significant amount of support from family and friends, which in turn required a service that was easily accessible. Relocating the service more than thirty miles away could be extremely disruptive for both the patient and their carers.

Committee Members agreed that a letter from the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, objecting to these proposals in the strongest possible terms, to be sent to the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel and the Director of Community and Wellbeing.

- **Resources** – Savings had been generated from the management of vacancies and a change in the provision of drivers in relation to the Mayor's car. A Member queried as to whether the reduction in the Mayor's budget applied only to the current financial year or whether this was a long term proposal. Concerns were also expressed about what the current arrangements for the Mayor's driver were. It was agreed that details relating to the current arrangements and whether these were temporary arrangements would be provided to Members, together with a breakdown of the savings generated by the proposals.

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**Resolved** – That the position be noted.

### 50. Shared Services Update

Members were provided with an update on the shared services joint initiative, which was known as the Local Government Shared Services (LGSS). It was noted that the Council had entered into such a service with Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) with a view to provide services from April 2010. It was explained that shared services involved local authorities working together to deliver better quality and more efficient services, with the aim of reducing the cost of providing back room functions and to reinvest these savings into front line services.

In November 2008 Slough Borough Council formally entered into a partnership agreement with CCC and NCC to explore the possibilities of delivering support service functions jointly. A Joint Management Board between the three councils was created, with each Council appointing a senior responsible officer to ensure suitable governance and programme management arrangements were in place. It was clarified that the services identified within the scope of the initiative included: transactional finance, Human Resources professional and administration processes, Revenues and Benefits and the Customer Service Centre. Other services such as IT were still being considered as potential opportunities. Having taken independent legal advice and the exploration of several different forms of partnerships it was established that the best way to deliver the services was to form a joint venture company. Members were informed that next stage was for each of the three Councils to prepare their respective Cabinet reports for the December 2009 cycle and that these reports would be seeking a recommendation on how to proceed based on the information contained within the Local Government Shared Services outline Business Case.

Members noted that this was an exciting initiative with the potential of generating significant cost savings for the local authorities involved. It was noted that a risk register was maintained to see that the risks were managed in an appropriate manner and it was agreed that the register would be distributed to all Members of the Committee.

**Resolved** – That the update be noted.

### 51. Grants to External Bodies

Details of the Small Grants 2009/2010 Round 1 grants awarded were detailed for Members information. A Member queried as to the service provided by Slough Equalities Commission and it was agreed that the terms of reference for this organisation would be sent to him for information. Members requested that future reports include information relating to ring fenced grants from central government and consideration of grants prior to allocations being made.

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**Resolved** – That the update be noted.

### **52. Forward Agenda Plan**

The Committee noted its agenda plan for future meetings.

### **53. Attendance Record**

Noted.

### **54. Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday, 14th January, 2010.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 10.25 pm)