

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 4th February, 2010.

Present:- Councillors Mann (Chair), Coad (Vice-Chair), Cryer, Davis, A S Dhaliwal and Walsh

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Anderson

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Pabbi

PART 1

63. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

64. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on Thursday 14 January 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th January, 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to an amendment of Minute Number 58 to include reference to a Member's question regarding whether an equality of funding existed in relation to Slough's different communities, in the context of the results of Slough Place Survey.

65. Adult Participation in Sport and Physical Activity - National Indicator 8

Appendices 1 and 2 to the report were tabled for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee considered a report outlining the authority's performance against the National Indicator for adult participation in sport and physical activity (NI 8). NI 8 was measured by the number of people doing 3 x 30 minutes of sport or moderate intensity physical activity each week and had been selected as one of Slough's Local Area Agreement (LAA) priority measures. Results for NI 8 for 2008/9 reported a continued drop in Slough's performance to 16.1% compared with the previous baseline of 19.4% and the target of 20.4%. A new delivery plan to address this issue had been developed and initial priorities were focused upon encouraging inactive people to become active and making participation opportunities accessible and affordable to all. Links were currently being made with other local authorities to learn from good practice and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), were providing expert challenge, benchmarking and practical advice to make sure Slough's improvement plan for NI 8 was the best it could be. It was emphasised, however, that NI 8 used a narrow definition of participation in sport and physical activity and therefore, many people who were physically active would not be included in the performance results, including those individuals who regularly walked or cycled. Local measures were being developed to provide a clear picture of trends and to identify where additional or different actions would be required.

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In the subsequent discussion, Members raised several issues including:

- A Member queried the relative importance of factors which deterred people from undertaking physical activity such as poverty and pressures on time. The Head of Culture and Sports Delivery referred the Committee to Appendix 2, 'Customer Visits - Slough Community Leisure', noting that a fall in the number of visits broadly coincided with the economic downturn. However, further to this, the NI 8 measure was limited and did not recognise activities such as yoga, Pilates or dance. A Member advised that interest in different sports often related to the profile of the sport and the Head of Culture and Sports Delivery informed the Committee that demand for certain facilities increased with high profile events such as Wimbledon or the airing of television shows, such as Dancing on Ice.
- With reference to team activities such as Sunday morning football, a Member queried how the Council was encouraging continued participation in such activities. The Head of Culture and Sports Delivery advised that work was currently being done in partnership with schools and colleges to address the drop-off rate, which was particularly high for women, and to encourage initial activity.
- A Member queried whether the proposals currently being considered regarding the redevelopment of the Tennis Centre were in-keeping with the long term strategy for increasing physical activity. The Strategic Director, Community and Wellbeing clarified that both redevelopment proposals submitted had envisaged a tennis offer. Further to this, one proposal included the development of a Ten Pin Bowling facility which was an activity that counted towards NI 8.
- A Member enquired whether the Council was actively pursuing the Change4Life Initiative and Officers advised that the Council was currently working with partners on this initiative and some external funding had been secured.
- With regard to the forthcoming 2012 Olympics, a Member highlighted the opportunities created by this to engage people in sport and enquired as to whether such opportunities were being utilised. The Head of Culture and Sports Delivery advised that there was extensive work taking place to maximise these opportunities, particularly within schools and local sports clubs.
- A Member enquired how the Council ensured that the Leisure/Sporting Offer in Slough was responsive to residents' preferences and was informed that feedback was gathered in several ways. A survey conducted on the High Street during 2008 had revealed a demand for activities such as Yoga and Pilates and had subsequently fed directly into a programme of activities. A healthy walking scheme had recently been re-launched and was proving to be very popular.

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- A concern was raised regarding prices of vending machine items in Slough's sports facilities, as these were seen to be somewhat prohibitive. The Committee was advised that this was an issue which had been recognised previously by the Managing Director of Slough Community Leisure and was being reviewed.
- A Member asked whether the Council had any influence over the definition of the national indicator and was informed that it did not and that consequently, the Council was establishing local indicators to provide a comprehensive overview of participation in sport and physical activity in Slough. However, by failing to achieve the national indicator the Council would not receive the associated financial award.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That a progress report be submitted to the Committee meeting in June/July regarding the council's performance in relation to NI 8

With the permission of the Committee Item 4, Performance Report (Finance) and Item 5, Medium Term Financial Strategy Report, were heard / taken together.

66. Performance Report (Finance)

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the reports for both agenda item 4, Performance Report (Finance) and agenda item 5, Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy Report, to the Committee and advised that the current budgetary position outlined in item 4 was inextricably linked to the Council's proposed Financial, Capital and Treasury Management strategies detailed in item 5. These strategies set out the draft Revenue, Capital and Treasury Management Budgets over the medium term and determined the amount of Council Tax to be levied from residents for 2010/11. The proposed revenue budget for this period was £103.979m, which equated to an increase of 1.5% from 2009/10 period and assumed an increase in government funding of 1.5% and a proposed rise in Council Tax of 2%. General fund balances had been maintained at previous year levels. Together with reserves and contingencies, these were currently adequate but there would be a need to keep a watching brief to ensure reserve levels were maintained in line with expenditure over the medium term.

There were a number of pressures facing the Council including the national framework being applied to local government, which would drive a future requirement for further efficiencies and potentially greater restrictions on council tax increases. Further to this, there was an expectation that future years' budgets would come under growing pressure as demand and expectation increased but government grant support reduced, with an emphasis on prioritisation, efficiency, innovation and collaboration in service delivery.

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In the subsequent discussion, Members raised several issues, including:

- Noting the council tax increase of 2%, a Member enquired as to how much income this would bring to the Council and was informed that it was approximately £900k.
- A Member requested an update on the situation regarding the Council's investment in Icelandic banks. The Committee was advised that the Council had already managed to secure the return of some of the investment and maintained its expectation that approximately 80% of the original investment would be returned in due course.
- A Member queried the funding allocated for the Slough Cemetery and Crematorium, in consideration of the recent consultation held regarding the management rules and planned expansion. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that £700k had been allocated but if further funding was required, Cabinet would have to make a decision following consideration of the financial implications of any specific proposals.
- With reference to the national sum of £11 billion of savings drawn from 'smarter government', which included the rationalisation of the Arms Length Bodies, a Member queried whether there would be any adverse effects resulting from this. The Committee was informed that the budget included no assumptions regarding the ALMO People 1st (Slough). However, if it was decided to bring the management of the Council's housing stock back within the Council's functions, the budget for People 1st (Slough) would also be absorbed. People 1st (Slough) had been established to deliver the Decent Homes Strategy and had allowed Slough to receive approximately £40m investment to improve the quality of the Council's housing stock. As this had, in the main now been completed and significant investment secured, the Council was in a strong position to re-absorb the management functions.
- A Member sought clarification on the consultation process applied with regard to the budget and enquired as to how effective it had been and if this could be substantiated with quantitative data. Members attention was drawn to the detail of the consultation process provided in the report pack and the Leader of the Council further advised that the consultation briefings had been well attended and had been expanded this year to include meetings held at the trading estate to consult businesses and an open briefing held at the Town Hall to consult residents and voluntary groups.
- With regard to discretionary charges for council services, a Member queried whether these were being examined. The Committee was informed that the Council was currently reviewing fees and charges as it does annually. Charges would be increased by 1 ½ % as a minimum in line with the Councils approach to inflation across expenditure heads. Any increase in excess of 3% would be reported to Members.

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- A Member requested an update on the situation regarding Slough's funding position from central government in relation to the population figures and migration. The Strategic Director and the Leader of the Council advised the Committee that the Council was continuing to address this issue in several ways. In addition to continuing to meet with Ministers to discuss the issue, the Council had begun a targeted campaign to demonstrate that specific services areas required additional funding. It was acknowledged that the Census return in 2010 would be key and the Council was working in partnership with its partners to prepare for this. A Member queried how, in the context of this funding position, the Council would continue to cater for the particularly high demand for school places and was informed that temporary solutions such as the bulge classes would be utilised alongside expanding the permanent capacity.
- A Member highlighted the considerable uncertainty surrounding the Free Personal Care Bill and raised the concern that without further information, the Council was in a very difficult position to make any financial plans. The Strategic Director informed the Committee that currently, no assumptions regarding this Bill had been built into the budget. The Council along with other council leads was lobbying the government regarding this issue
- With regard to the reserves of £5m, a Member queried whether this was adequate and whether other Councils assumed a similar position. The Strategic Director advised that the levels of reserves was adequate to meet the organisation's needs. The basis underpinning this assurance was explained fully in the budget presentation and the document pack.
- A Member enquired as to what involvement Members have with regard to the allocation of Area Based Grants (ABG). The Leader of the Council advised that the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) would discuss where to target funds and Cabinet would then make a decision regarding the LSP recommendations.
- A Member queried whether the Council had any control over the level of Parish precepts as the increase in some areas were high and whether performance could be measured. Members were advised that the Parish precept levied was a matter for each Parish Council to consider. The Deputy Borough Secretary advised that the Community Governance Review which would take place in the near future, could enable Members to consider governance arrangements in the Borough.

The Chair thanked Members for their contribution and proposed that the report be noted and that the Cabinet be requested to agree that any windfall income received by the Council in Year be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Performance Report, and that Scrutiny be allocated a budget of up to £10k to be vired from existing Member related budgets to enable:

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- More short, sharp focussed reviews on particular topics or more in-depth reviews;
- Support to Councillors in reviewing performance information;
- Additional scrutiny training in investigative skills and analysing data/evidence.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the Cabinet be recommended to agree:

1. That any windfall income received by the Council in Year be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Performance Report from 2010/11
2. That Scrutiny be allocated a budget of up to £10k to be vired from existing Member related budgets to enable:
 - More short, sharp focussed reviews on particular topics or more in-depth reviews;
 - Support to Councillors in reviewing performance information;
 - Additional scrutiny training in investigative skills and analysing data/evidence.

67. Medium Term Financial Strategy Report

See Minute Number 66 for the discussion and decisions relating to this item.

68. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – That the agenda plan be altered as detailed below:

- That a progress report be submitted to the Committee meeting in June/July regarding the council's performance in relation to NI 8

69. Attendance Record

The attendance record was noted.

70. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm)