

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

18 SEPTEMBER 2012

Present: Councillor S Rackett (Chair)
Councillors S Counter, G Derbyshire, S Greenslade and
A Joynes

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

1 ELECTION OF A CHAIR

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Rackett be elected Chair for the 2012/13 Municipal Year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There were no apologies for absence.

3 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

The Panel received a report of the Head of Legal and Property Services including the terms of reference and the draft work programme.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and explained how the Panel came about. She advised that the Panel was a sub-panel of Overview and Scrutiny tasked with regularly monitoring outsourced services. She recommended that the following be added to the terms of reference: "To contribute to the annual scrutiny report."

The Chair referred to Appendix 3 and noted the various services, other than the three biggest contracts (the leisure centres, parking and the Colosseum), which had been externalised. He asked where the scrutiny of the Council's relationship with Watford Community Housing Trust should sit. It was agreed that this was a role for Overview and Scrutiny who could establish a Task Group if required.

Councillor Derbyshire noted that that the scrutiny of the services and the monitoring of performance data were two separate areas. He added that it was important that the Panel understood the relationship between the Council and the service provider. It would be useful to see the contractual documentation, even if they had to be considered as a Part B item, to consider the responsibilities on both sides. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer agreed and said that when a service was scrutinised the commissioning officer from the associated service could attend and discuss the contracts with the Panel. It was suggested in the work programme that the Panel receive briefings on the different contracts.

The Chair asked whether the Panel would be involved in the tendering process for new contracts. Councillor Derbyshire advised that his view was that these services had not yet been outsourced and were therefore not within the Panel's remit. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel that this had been discussed by Overview and Scrutiny. She had contacted the Managing Director and he had confirmed that the awarding of contracts was an executive function and if any pre-contract discussion was required then this was the role of Major Projects Board. Councillor Counter added that in considering the existing contracts the Panel could feed back their views on any areas that should be reconsidered in any future agreements.

The Chair noted that the terms of reference stipulated that there should be a maximum of four meetings per year and said that there could be an occasion where an area merited further investigation. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this was not a problem and if Members felt it was necessary to hold additional meetings then these could be arranged. Councillor Derbyshire suggested that a meeting could be adjourned and reconvened to investigate an issue.

The Chair referred to Appendix 3 and the other contracts such as the management of temporary accommodation and advised that these contracts could be scrutinised in future.

It was agreed that the proposed future meeting dates to be circulated and agreed by email.

ACTION – Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer.

RESOLVED –

1. that the amended terms of reference as set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
2. that the draft work programme as set out in Appendix 2 be agreed.
3. that the list of services in Appendix 3 be noted.

OUTSOURCED SERVICES PERFORMANCE DATA AND INFORMATION

The Panel received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head giving details of performance information collected and appending the performance indicators for SLM for the first quarter of 2012/13.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head introduced the report and noted that performance indicators provided a health warning system for services – highlighting where a service was not performing well, where it could improve and if performance was declining. She suggested that the Panel might want to look at the complaints received as another element of performance information. She advised that she would look at what other indicators were collected for parking, the Colosseum and SLM and the Panel could decide what would be most useful.

She noted that there was an ongoing issue around usage at Central Leisure Centre. It had been suggested that levels of swimming had seen a decline nationally but there were other possible explanations.

The Chair said that SLM would be a good contract to consider at the next meeting. A report had been produced by the Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee in 2010/11 and it would be useful to see how the issues raised at that time had been addressed.

ACTION – Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head suggested that representatives from the company concerned could be invited to the meetings.

Councillor Counter raised the issue of user satisfaction. It would be important for the Panel considered areas such as accessibility and value for money.

The Chair suggested consulting with user groups. If the Panel felt they wished to explore the issues raised further, the groups could be invited to a meeting. The Panel agreed that a broad spectrum of the user groups should be consulted.

Councillor Joynes noted that schools had been using Woodside Leisure Centre for PE classes. This may have had an effect on usage figures. She also referred to the facilities that were available in the gym and questioned whether there was enough provision for women.

Councillor Derbyshire noted that gym usage had dropped by 15 percent at Central Leisure Centre and asked why there had been such a significant fall. Councillor Counter suggested that there was more competition in the town from other gyms. She added that bench-marking with other non-SLM facilities could be interesting.

The Chair noted that gym usage by gender and race would be valuable and referred to the petition about women-only swimming that was discussed at Full Council in 2011. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that

under the Equality Act 2010 the Council could not contract out the duty to promote equalities.

Councillor Derbyshire considered that a budget statement for the services might be helpful in assessing performance. Councillor Counter suggested that a one-page summary would be sufficient.

RESOLVED –

1. that the performance of the identified outsourced service indicators at the end of quarter 1 2012/13 be noted along with the Panel's comments.
2. that the Panel's suggestions for future performance reports be noted.

6 TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer asked whether there were any particular areas in which Members felt they would like more training. Members could be offered in-house training if they wished.

Members felt that this was a topic to be kept under review.

RESOLVED –

that the training needs of the Panel be kept under review.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.45 pm