

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

7 JANUARY 2015

Present: Councillor P Taylor (Chair)
Councillor K Hastrick (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Counter, J Dhindsa, S Greenslade, A Joynes and
R Martins

Also present: Councillor D Scudder (Portfolio Holder)
Karl Miles, SLM Contract Manager
Ian Cook, SLM Area Contract Manager
Kyle Maundrell, SLM Operations Manager
Kelly Spencer, SLM Woodside General Manager

Officers: Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services
Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Corporate, Leisure and Community Section Head
Contract Monitoring Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was one change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Collett replaced Councillor Greenslade.

32 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

33 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2014 were submitted and signed.

34 ACTIONS UPDATE

The Panel received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer updating Members on outstanding actions from previous meetings. It was agreed that a number of the actions could be signed off.

With reference to item PR18 in the report, the SLM Contract Manager explained that price comparison analysis was conducted with competitors to ensure the best prices could be offered. The Chair asked whether swimming only

membership would be considered for the Leisure Centres; the SLM Contract Manager said that this was part of future plans.

With reference to item PR25 in the report, the Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that the current workload for Revenues and Benefits was increasing as a result of significant IT downtime in November and December on both Academy and Anite resulting in 100 more documents outstanding than the same time last year, and because as of October, Revenues and Benefits have been getting data match files from HMRC for pension credits going back up to four years which were identifying significant overpayments from pensions - and not explaining there were occupational pensions; this was new work. There had also been significant changes to how persons from abroad were treated. This had meant that these claims had been taking a lot of resource due to having to verify they had been in the country for five years and in paid work. Furthermore, a large number of these claimants were self-employed and had no accounts and this had also added to the workload.

Councillor Hastrick outlined a case where a constituent's payments had apparently been cancelled within two days but had taken 11 weeks to reinstate. The Partnership and Performance Section Head commented that this sounded like an exceptional case as reinstatement normally only took 30 days to complete.

Councillor Martins commented that he was a little worried about the increased workload for Revenue and Benefits although he appreciated the work had to be done. The Partnership and Performance Section Head explained that the matter would be kept under review with further performance information being available in quarter three. Councillor Joynes asked whether the data would go to the Budget Panel and/or Audit Committee. The Partnership and Performance Section Head explained it would come to this Panel as it was a performance issue.

With reference to item PR26 in the report, Councillor Counter asked whether the information would go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - the Partnership and Performance Section Head said that it would.

With reference to items VE17 and VE18 in the report, Councillor Dhindsa asked whether the accuracy of the data was checked as there were still apparently problems in relation to both of these matters. Councillor Counter commented that a special disinfectant could be used to remove the odour of cat urine that may help with regard to item VE18. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services advised that she would alert the Contract Monitoring Officer to increase inspections in relation to both of those issues and to feedback the information from Cllr Counter to Veolia

ACTION - The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services to follow up with the Contract Monitoring Officer and feedback to the Panel

With reference to item VE20 in the report, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services outlined recent press articles where there had been some

criticism of the re-launch of the Food Waste Aware Campaign which was considered by the UKIP candidate as patronising and a waste of money. However, the Watford Borough Council leaflet explaining the procedures was published on-line as a result and gained positive feedback from the public. Consequently there was wider national and local media coverage than expected. The next stage of the campaign would be to send out leaflets to flats shortly. The campaign was funded by a grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government, contained helpful information for the public with the intention of reducing the amount of food waste being wrongly disposed of in the black bins (34.7% of black bin waste was food which should be in the green bin ending up being composted rather than in costly land fill). Councillor Scudder commented that the Watford Borough Council leaflet was an extremely useful and comprehensive document.

With reference to item VE22 in the report, Councillor Collett explained that the issue also related to litter in the alleyways to Sheriff Way and Nottingham Close.

ACTION - The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services to raise the matter with the Contract Monitoring Officer and report to the Panel.

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COUNCIL MONITORING OF THE SLM CONTRACT

The Panel received a presentation from the Corporate, Leisure & Community Section Head on the monitoring of the SLM contract. At the conclusion, the Chair asked if there were any questions.

Councillor Dhindsa said that most targets appeared fine and asked how the targets that were not being met by SLM were monitored. The Commissioning Manager explained that action was taken to establish why the target was not being met and then a plan was developed to resolve the issue. She was confident that the targets set were realistic and the vast majority were being achieved. The SLM Area Contract Manager commented that the present contract was drawn up on similar lines to others the company was involved in and having a one percent improvement rate was fair for a contract of this type. He was confident that the target would be achieved - although if other budget gyms were to open this could have an impact on SLM.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that within the contract there were legal solutions if matters went awry. These included dispute resolution clauses. She outlined how the contract differed from that in relation to Veolia and explained how default notices could be issued, mediation undertaken and escalation to other processes carried out.

The Chair asked about the process of determination of annual targets. The Commissioning Manager explained that when the contract was first drawn up a one percent target had been agreed with SLM that was considered realistic. In the 2014/15 financial year the focus had been on the services provided to 14 to 25 year olds so as to maximise their involvement and throughput in the Leisure Centres. Additionally there were targets to increase total throughput and total membership which would help to increase participation.

The Chair asked how it was known what age groups were making use of the various centres. The SLM Contract Manager explained that members were issued with 'Everyone Active Cards' that were swiped to gain entry to the Leisure Centres and these contained the data that was provided to the Client Team.

Councillor Dhindsa made reference to the £24 million investment in the contract and wondered whether it was mainly Watford residents who were benefiting - particularly as the Woodside Leisure Centre was located near the area boundary. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that Three Rivers District Council had invested two million pounds in the Woodside Centre and that there was income generation potential from patrons using the facilities from outside of the area. In response to further questions from Councillor Dhindsa, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that there would be further opportunities for profit share of 50/50 in the future and she undertook to find out what the threshold would be to trigger this.

ACTION - Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services

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SLM - UPDATE ON SERVICE PROVISION

The Panel received a presentation from the SLM Contract Manager, supported by the SLM Operations Manager and General Manager, on the service provision of the SLM Contract. At the conclusion, the Chair asked if there were any questions.

Councillor Counter asked whether there was an electronic survey device on customer feedback at Woodside Leisure Centre as the one at Central Leisure Centre had proved most useful. The SLM Contract Manager explained that there was and this was currently located in the Cafeteria - although it was relocated regularly to capture feedback from the broadest range of users

Councillor Counter asked whether there were plans to carry out another customer questionnaire. The SLM Contract Manager explained that one had recently been conducted and these would be carried out annually with results fed back to the Client Team. Councillor Counter asked what changes were made as a result of the surveys. The SLM Contract Manager explained that the main improvements were around cleaning and maintenance (always key issues) where work had been undertaken with the contract teams to enhance services.

Councillor Counter asked whether there would be any value in putting notices in the leisure centres asking people to leave the facilities in the condition in which they were found. The SLM Contract Manager explained that some notices were already displayed but it was unclear as to whether people actually read them so their value was a little questionable.

The Chair asked why the cleaning figures at Central were not at such a high standard as at Woodside. The SLM Contract Manager said he was aware that

improvements were needed at Central and that changes were being made to address the issues.

Councillor Joynes asked when the 'Everyone Health' programme was introduced. The SLM Contract Manager informed her that this centralised team were set up in March 2014 to work more closely with council's on SLM's contribution to the Public Health agenda and had recently won an obesity programme contract elsewhere in the country. Councillor Joynes asked what qualifications SLM healthcare professionals were required to hold. The SLM Area Contract Manager explained that these employees had wide experience of working in the field of public health.

Councillor Joynes asked for an explanation of the QUEST accreditation. The SLM Contract Manager explained that this provided a complete and thorough look at the organisation so all aspects of the business and service delivery were assessed and graded. This included such processes as 'mystery shoppers' who would report back on the level of service they had received. In effect, QUEST was the industry standard benchmark accreditation for best practice and continual improvement. He reassured the Panel that it was not simply a box ticking exercise and was more a validation of services as opposed to an assessment.

Councillor Hastrick asked how people were referred in to the 'Everyone Health' programme. The SLM Contract Manager explained that this was a new healthcare division and their recent contract elsewhere in the country included referrals being made by GP's to the fitness pathways with programmes running for 10 to 12 weeks for clients. At present, there were 200 clients on the programme - which sought to help with such issues as obesity and smoking. The local GP referral scheme was set up three years ago and involved personal trainers who had been trained to adapt exercise programmes to the needs of those with medical conditions. Local GPs and other health professionals referred people with a range of health conditions into the programme.

Councillor Hastrick made reference to clients sent by GP's to libraries to obtain information on fitness pathways and asked how 'buy in' was obtained by health workers. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained in detail the new funding arrangements for Public Health preventative projects with the move from Primary Care Trusts to the Public Health Board (at County Council level). The existing Watford GP referral scheme with SLM was a local project set up three years ago through funding channels in existence prior to the change in commissioning arrangements. There was now a county wide drive to improve exercise referral schemes generally - making these more comprehensive, and seeking greater involvement by the health professionals. She explained that the Council's role in the new arrangements was to act as a conduit and enabler and that we would work with SLM to ensure the services they could offer were brought to the attention of the county-wide commissioning process.

Councillor Dhindsa commented that the recent visit by the Panel to Woodside Leisure Centre was very good and asked whether figures on membership by age/gender/ethnicity/local resident could be provided.

ACTION - Contract Monitoring Officer

Councillor Dhindsa made reference to the 14 percent of BME staff employed by SLM at the two leisure centres and asked if information as to their levels/grades could be provided. The SLM Contract Manager explained that the majority would be exercise instructors and he undertook to provide the data.

ACTION - Corporate, Leisure & Community Section Head

Councillor Dhindsa made reference to the apparent inappropriate behaviour of some SLM staff towards female swimmers at the women's only session. He wondered whether training could be provided to help educate staff in this regard - commenting there were always two sides to any potential misunderstanding. The SLM Contract Manager confirmed that SLM provided training as part of the staff induction programme but advised that any incidents causing concern to customers should be raised at the time with the duty manager on shift so that individual issues could be identified and responded to in order to resolve them. The Partnership and Performance Section Head clarified that when services were outsourced, the Council retained responsibility for equality issues and she confirmed that any concerns should be raised at the time with SLM with the exact details being given and escalated if not dealt with to the client team.

Councillor Dhindsa asked whether there might be the possibility of increasing women only swimming sessions. The SLM Contract Manager explained that a balanced programme had to be maintained to serve all customers. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services said that the recent review identified that the main pool was not being used to capacity during this session but that attendees preferred to gather in the small pool to wade and socialise. As the intention of the Women only swim sessions was to encourage physical activity for this group, there was a need to re-examine the purpose of these sessions and solutions, such as a course of swimming lessons to encourage the participants to gain confidence in using the large pool, may be better rather than expanding the provision. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services said that a more detailed look would be undertaken in to this with a survey of users being carried out - working in partnership with SLM.

The Chair asked about the ongoing competency test for staff. The SLM Contract Manager explained this was an annual multi-choice examination which had to be re-taken if failed and was based on the induction 22 slide presentation. The Chair asked about the failure rate. The SLM Operations Manager responded that no one had failed the test thus far, albeit that a 20 out of 20 score was required to pass. The test was taken following refresher training on the induction programme. Councillor Dhindsa asked that a copy of the test questions be made available to the Panel.

ACTION - Corporate, Leisure & Community Section Head

Councillor Counter asked when the Woodside showers would be refurbished. The SLM Operations Manager explained that works would commence next week

and be completed within a fortnight. Councillor Counter asked if the shower drains were operating effectively and the SLM Operations Manager explained that these had been checked recently and appeared satisfactory. Councillor Counter commented that she had seen an improvement but there were still issues with the drainage. The SLM Contract Manager explained that further investigation would be conducted in to this aspect.

Councillor Counter asked how often spin bikes were replaced. The SLM Operations Manager explained that these were regularly checked, maintained and calibrated and that they were changed approximately every five years.

The Chair asked about the climbing wall review time scale. The SLM Contract Manager explained that this would be reviewed in the next quarter and the consensus appeared to be that these should take place so as to enhance usage opportunities. The Chair asked why children under eight years old were prohibited from using the wall. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that the wall had originally been installed for what could be described as climbing 'purists' as opposed to the St Albans Rock Box offer which was more targeted at parties and family usage. However, this may not be serving Watford as a whole and in effect the contract could be subsidising what could be termed as an elite sport. As a result, the situation should be reviewed over the next 12 months when it may be that difficult decisions had to be made and appropriate changes introduced. Councillor Counter asked whether the climbers using the service had been involved in the revised marketing of the climbing wall and the SLM Contract Manager explained that they had.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These were as follows:

- The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services to find out what the threshold for 50/50 profit share was and report to the Panel.
- The Contract Monitoring Officer to obtain data on leisure centre membership on the basis of age/gender/ethnicity/local resident and report to the Panel.
- The Corporate, Leisure & Community Section Head to obtain details of the levels/grades of BME staff employed at the leisure centres and report to the Panel.
- The Corporate, Leisure & Community Section Head to obtain a copy of the annual competency test questions for SLM staff and report to the Panel.

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WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the Work Programme. He explained that the Parking Services Annual Report would be considered by the CPZ Policies Task Group.

The Panel agreed that a visit to the Central Leisure Centre would be beneficial and to decide whether a visit to the Colosseum would also be useful later in the year (and perhaps be held immediately before an OSSP meeting).

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.08 pm