
Actions from Previous Meeting

Committee considering report: Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission on 15 January 2019

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission on the actions recorded from the previous meeting.

2. Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission considers the update report and recommends further action as appropriate.

3. Introduction

3.1 There were a total of seven actions recorded at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission on 9th October 2018.

3.2 In order to hold the Officers to account, Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Members are asked to consider whether the response is satisfactory and whether any further action is required.

4. Action 2 - Key Accountable Performance 2018/19 - Quarter One

4.1 It was requested that a written response be provided by Gary Lugg regarding the strategy in place to fill vacancies within the planning service:

Response for Gary Lugg: *It is now forecast that there will be an 8% reduction in application numbers this year compared to last year. The 25% reduction mentioned was a very early forecast and application numbers have increased in recent months. As part of the New Ways of Working review of Development and Planning it was noted that Development Control had historic targets agreed locally with its customers. After a review it was agreed that the targets should be changed to reflect the national average. The targets were increased during quarter 2 and so it is not going to be possible to achieve the new higher targets for the whole year. In addition there has been a significant number of vacancies in Development Control in recent months (35% of case officer posts have been vacant). The Management Team are actively recruiting to the vacant posts with 10 posts recruited to in recent months. A fresh round of recruitment is now underway with a view to recruiting to the remaining vacant posts. The Team are confident that the new higher performance targets will be achieved in 2019/20.*

5. Action 4 - Key Accountable Performance 2017 / 18 Q4

5.1 It was requested that a written response be requested from the Highways Department regarding why the car parking target had not been achieved.

Response from Mark Edwards: The car parking target was not achieved in part due to a pressure on the parking budget of £105k. This was due to a number of factors – some of the parking machines were out of action due to vandalism, we had a shortage of CEO's and parking ticket sales were down.

There was also power outage problems in the Wharf area of Newbury due to Electricity Board failings beyond our control that took parking equipment out of service. This all contributed to us showing a shortfall against our income target.

6. Action 5 - Financial Performance Report - Month 5

- 6.1 It was requested that a response regarding grass cutting be sought from Paul Hendry and the Countryside Team.

Response from Paul Hendry: The Grounds Maintenance Contract calls for 2 rural verge cuts (all verges on A/B and minor roads outside urban settlements) and 8 cuts on urban verges. The rural verge cutting was fully completed in mid November, both cuts. The urban verge cut 5 was suspended due to the very dry weather and cut 6 commenced 3 weeks later, the rest of the cutting rounds continued as planned. Cut 8 wasn't fully completed due to the cold wet, weather in November. During the suspension the grass cutting teams were sent to carry out additional site line clearance (those areas where historically we get requests for additional cuts) on main routes in the District and to cut the approach 'gateways' into towns and villages. The cutting teams also carried out works arising from public requests for service. These additional works including sightline clearance/gateways would ordinarily be paid for by the Client but in this case there was no cost as the contract staff were diverted from contractual duties to additional works tasks.

7. Action 6 - Financial Performance Report - Month 5

- 7.1 It was requested that costing details for the SWEP in November be provided.

Response from Sally Kelsall: The winter provision costs which is in addition to the SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) which is triggered when temperatures are low. The winter provision is from 1 November to 31 March 2019 for people with a local connection. Costs for November are listed below.

The costs for November are as follows and include extra staff cover to deliver Winter emergency/SWEP bed cover at 210 Newtown Road, Newbury from 02/11/18 to 25/11/18:

- Agency staff at £1457.52
- Two Saints staff overtime at £1276.88

8. Action 7 - Financial Performance Report - Month 5

- 8.1 It was requested that The Shaw House team be challenged on why the income target was not being met and what the plan was for turning the situation around.

Response from Paul James: Currently (December 2018) we are forecasting a £7k pressure in the budget of Shaw House by the end of the financial year. i.e. we estimate we will be £7k off our target for the year. We are working to reduce that further.

At the start of the financial year we estimated that there may be an income shortfall of £30k in the Shaw House budget (i.e. £30k worse than our target for the year) and I'm delighted that the team have worked hard to reduce that significantly.

The drop in income is entirely due to the decreasing use of Shaw House by the council for meetings, which is due to the large amount of savings all services have had to make in recent years. Council use of Shaw House has decreased by about 33% in the last 2 years. This was modelled in the business plan but has occurred faster than predicted.

However, commercial income is rising to compensate and we have a number of initiatives in the Business Plan to develop non-Council / commercial income further. For example we are renting offices to the Education Business Partnership, trying out commercial wedding ceremonies as well as building on our already successful programme of heritage/cultural events and activities. For example, this year we had a record breaking 1100 people at the OpenAir Cinema in August, many of our school holiday family activities sell out and we have just had our most successful ever Christmas Fair (1800 visitors).

Shaw House is fully booked for conferences and meetings during the days/times of the week most popular with commercial clients. We have spare capacity at other times of the week and incentivise that with special discounts/offers. We charge council users £18 per hour compared to £35-55 per hour for commercial clients. Customer feedback from all sectors is uniformly excellent.

As with all public venues Shaw House is susceptible to the confidence in the general economy, local competition and market forces. Issues such as bad weather can also affect bookings for meetings and events and family activities. However, since 2011-12 the net costs have reduced from £250k to £140k and the number of users has risen from 37,000 to 47,000.

For information, we have an experienced team at Shaw House including a Business Development and Marketing Manager from a commercial background, Becky Scantlebury, who also manages the marketing across Culture (Shaw House, Museum, Archaeology) and Libraries. My background is in running three successful cultural trusts/centres in heritage buildings, as well as experience in local government policy, partnership and service development and change management.

While developing a new Cultural Strategy for West Berkshire we are also investigating options for Shaw House to be independent of/less dependent on the council in the future. Sustainable options may include Shaw House becoming part of a larger (possibly county-wide, or even sub-regional) historic buildings and/or cultural trust.

Please get in touch if you would like a tour of Shaw House and/or to ask me further questions about any aspect of the business.

9. Appendices

Appendix A – Actions arising from the last OSMC meeting