

FINANCE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 June 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Rand (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Bloom, B Chapple (Vice Chairman), Everitt, Huxley, Sims, M Smith, Mrs Stamp and Winn.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Chilver and Lambert.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings held on 8 April 2015 and 27 May 2015 be approved as correct records.

2. 2014/15 LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT – PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received a report on the key outcomes and outputs achieved by the leisure management contract during its second year of operation in 2014/15, as well as an overview of the key suggested actions for 2015/16. Mr Duncan Jefford (Regional Director, Everyone Active), Mathew Nicholson (Area Contract Manager, Everyone Active) and Christine Coppack (Contract Manager, Everyone Active) attended the meeting to present information and to respond to issues raised by Members.

The new leisure management contract for Aqua Vale and the Swan Pool had commenced on 1 April 2013, after being awarded to Sports and Leisure Management. Under their brand name “Everyone Active” (EA), formed in 1987, this organisation now managed approximately 100 centres across the UK on behalf of 28 local authorities.

AVDC provided a monitoring service as part of the contract arrangements and undertook monitoring through regular inspections and monthly contract performance meetings. The contract had realised a betterment to AVDC of circa £620,000 per annum (index linked). £120,000 was achieved through not having to pay a management fee to the leisure centre operator and £508,000 was generated by the fee paid by EA for managing the centres.

The performance meetings discussed a range of performance indicators, as detailed in Appendix A to the Committee report, and related to the following areas:-

- Footfall (user throughput) – there had been an increase in usage during 2014/15 with Aqua Vale recording 644,457 visitors and the Swan Pool (including the all weather pitch) 390,432 visitors. Total patronage for the contract was 1,034,889 improving on last year’s figure by 33,738 visitors, equivalent to 3.26% increase on the previous year.
- Health and Safety – there had been 368 accidents at Aqua Vale this year (an increase of 8.9% on the previous year) with six being RIDDOR reportable accidents. The Swan Pool had recorded 117 accidents (a decrease of 7.87% on the previous year), none of which had been RIDDOR reportable. This represents 2.99 injuries per 10,000 visits. The difference in the number of injuries between the two centres reflects the different range of facilities being

offered with a far greater number stemming from the leisure waters at the Aqua Vale with more minor injuries being sustained by young children.

- Bi-Annual Health and Safety-Report: The Property Manager, Lead Officer Health, Safety, Fire and Resilience, Leisure Facilities Technical Manager and the Contracts Manager for Everyone Active undertook a full audit of the facilities in October 2014. The audit had raised 23 points from the site inspection (accumulative across both leisure centres) and four points from the management system. The Council and Everyone Active were working together in a positive manner to remedy the minor actions raised.
- Comments, Compliments & Complaints – both centres provided various feedback routes for customers: Written Customer Comments Cards, Electronic data pod at reception, via the website – ‘Have Your Say’ & ‘Contact the Manager’ both of which go direct to the Contract Manager & the General Managers of each site. All Comments were recorded and reviewed at the monthly Contract performance meetings with a selection displayed within the centres and shared with customers to demonstrate outcomes.

(Over the last financial year 157 complaints had been received at Aqua Vale (representing 0.024% of centre visits) and 113 at the Swan Pool (representing 0.029% of centre visits).

Annual Comments, Complaints and Compliments Reports – this had been undertaken in December 2014 by AVDC’s Customer Services Liaison Officer and had concluded that the system was working well, and that all comments/complaints were being investigated and responded to in a professional manner. There was a culture on site for providing a high level of service and good customer care.

- User and Non User Consultation Programme – a series of consultation meetings were held with users throughout the year with the main consultation done through user forums held four times a year at both centres, led by the EA Contract Manager and/or site General Managers. The meetings enabled thoughts, ideas, feedback and future site proposals to be discussed in an open manner. Minutes of the meetings were sent to those attending and displayed within the Centres. All operational actions identified were then managed by EA. Other means of consultation were shown in Appendix A in section 4 to the Committee report.
- Utilities – EA was striving hard to reduce the carbon footprint of the centres and have been recognised for their efforts by being accredited with ISO 14001 for Environmental Best Practise. Both with improved sustainable technologies being included in the recent capital projects and improved site housekeeping, EA was reported to have saved £90,000 on utility costs and subsequently saved tonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the environment.
- Swimming Lessons – The swimming lesson programme for both centres was highly successful and Aqua Vale and Swan Pool currently run at approximately 1400 and 1250 pupils respectively.

Following the completion of the Contract’s first year trading, EA had completed an action plan in partnership with AVDC to continue to develop and extend community engagement. This included inviting local partners and schools to visit the Centres to gain valuable knowledge and work experience so to benefit all parties.

EA continued to focus on a comprehensive carbon management strategy with a primary focus on reducing energy consumption and implementing environmental best

practise. Display Energy Certificate (DEC) ratings were currently being renewed on collation of a full year's utility data. The current ratings were an 'F' for Aqua Vale which was an improvement from 'G' prior to the implementation of initiatives. The lower rating was largely due to the large wet-side facilities, which required considerable energy to heat the swimming pools and air to acceptable temperatures. The current rating for Swan Pool was 'C', although this would need to be reviewed when the current building redevelopment works had been completed.

During 2014-15, EA had continued to support the apprenticeship scheme whilst also encouraging staff to apply for and achieve personal development opportunities through the EA Training Programme. The Emerging Managers Programme and the Emerging Heads of Department programmes are currently operating to help provide EA staff with the skills required to reach their full potential. Two Aylesbury colleagues have successfully 'graduated' and now held senior positions.

Following the recent service review within Leisure, EA had agreed to continue and administer the "Passport to Leisure" scheme allowing discounted/free access for local residents receiving a range of benefits or financial support at both the Aqua Vale Swimming and Fitness Centre, Aylesbury and Swan Pool and Leisure Centre, Buckingham. In addition, EA had maintained free swimming for the under 5's.

The leisure centres had also had a positive year due to their actions and initiatives under social/community responsibility. This was evidenced by a series of events whereby free access had been given for use by local and national charities, including The Anthony Nolan Trust, Sports Relief, Oxfam, Florence Nightingale Hospice, and Buckingham Rotary Club. The NHS saw Aqua Vale as a tremendous asset as the centre management allowed the NHS to undertake screening sessions of voluntary customers and improve the number of registered donors.

The EA Contract Manager continues to take an active role in local partnerships to provide support and opportunities on the panel of AV SPAN (Aylesbury Vale Sport and Physical Activity Network) awarding funding or bursaries to talented athletes or coach in the Vale.

Both leisure centres provide training opportunities for a variety of nationally recognised qualifications and Aqua Vale was a registered training centre for governing bodies, these include: National Pool Lifeguard Qualifications, Health & Safety IOSH, Pool Plant Operators Course, 1st Aid & various Swim teachers' qualifications & CPDs (Continual Personal Development) opportunities.

The swim programme had increased from a 42 week programme to 50 week programme, allowing greater continuity for learner swimmers. Coupled with this, free casual swimming was now offered to those on the programme during the Easter and Summer holidays. This modification to the Contract Specification increased the income generating potential to the Operator and also provided an additional payment to the Council. When the Operator hit the ceiling capacity of the Swim programme (year 3) the Council would receive an additional £12,000 (CPI uplift) per annum.

The Swan Pool re-development project had commenced onsite on 16 February 2015. The Council's chosen building contractor (Balfour Beatty Construction Services UK) had engaged a professional team of construction specialists, adding expertise to the project. The project was making good progress and was on time and on budget with an expected completion date by the end of January 2016. The £2.6m project had been funded by the Council and been awarded a £500,000 grant by Sport England after the Council's Leisure Officers had submitting a successful funding bid.

The Vale Park Bowls Green had been converted into two five-a-side synthetic turf pitches and opened for community use in December 2014. All bookings were made via the leisure centre operator who had reported a good level of interest and usage of the facility. The conversion would save £10,000 per annum in bowls green maintenance charges and provided for an income share arrangement which had been agreed between the Council and the Operator. The anticipated additional income was expected to be circa £15,000 p.a. to the Council after deducting operating expenses. The project had been bought in on budget / on time and was another additional asset the leisure centre could offer to the local community.

The Operator would continue to strive to increase visitor numbers again in 2015/16, and to build a sizable client base for the new synthetic turf pitches at Aqua Vale. However, visitor number would be impacted by the planned capital improvement project at the Swan Pool. Detailed phasing of the project had been agreed between AVDC, BB, and EA to ensure there was minimum disruption to customers and continuity of services.

EA was planning to launch a new GP Referral Scheme, aimed at improving and maintaining the health and mental wellbeing of inactive people with at risk of developing chronic disease. They would also continue to develop a robust succession plan for growth of team members' thereby retaining important local knowledge and experience within the contract and increase customer satisfaction, benchmarked against previous years customer comment cards. The users forum would also be further developed to increase the awareness and opportunities for customers to have greater two-way communications inside and out of this meeting structure.

Under the requirements of the Leisure Management Specification the Aqua Vale undertook the Sport England National Benchmarking Survey (NBS) during April 2015. This was an essential aid to benchmark the centres against similar facilities of a comparable nature, and gain a greater understanding of the users' satisfaction and thoughts on both centres. Over 300 surveys had been conducted over a seven day period at differing times of day to liaise with as many customers from differing user groups as possible to help establish a 'context picture' of the current service provision. At the time of writing the Committee report, the results had not been received. It has been agreed that the Swan Pool NBS will be deferred until 2016, on the grounds that any bench mark survey conducted during the phased capital project would not reflect normal operations.

Members requested further information and were informed:-

- (i) that, as anticipated, there had been a reduction in the footfall at Swan Pool since the re-development project had started. However, EA were doing everything they could to minimise the impact on customers at this time and were confident that the patronage would increase again once the works were completed.

The main target set by Sports England, in approving funding for the project, was that the patronage at Swan Pool would increase by at least 5% year-on – year once the project had been completed. This would be from a base position of October 2013 when the funding application had been submitted. EA and AVDC were confident that these patronage figures were achievable.

- (ii) an explanation was provided on the types of issues that were highlighted in comments and compliments, which often related to suggestions on how to

improve things or new activities that customers would like to see introduced. All comments were reported and reviewed via the monthly contract performance meetings.

- (iii) that all complaints were seen by the EA Contract Manager who ensured that they were investigated and responded to in a professional manner. The performance of the complaints system was audited annually by AVDC.
- (iv) on the different approaches that were used to try and consult with non users.
- (v) that the number of minor accidents (e.g. scraped knee, children bumping into each other in the pool) was very low and, per 10,000 customers was in the mid-range compared to other similar facilities managed by EA.
- (vi) that Aqua Vale could become crowded at peak times such as during school holidays. EA tried to minimise the impact on customers at these times such as having a system of coloured band to time limit centre use. All measures were done in accordance with industry standards and guidelines.
- (vii) that while the positive health outcomes for the community through use of the leisure centres could not be quantified, the centres did work with the NHS on issues such as providing health screening / checks from time-to-time. EA provided a service called 'Everyone Health' which was measuring health outcomes for a number of Councils including in Nottingham and Cambridge and could do this locally however, there would likely be an additional charge for this service.
- (viii) that EA had employed 4 apprentices through the Amateur Swimming Association who had been assisted in achieving nationally recognised qualifications. Two of the apprentices had now graduated to full time positions with EA, one at Aqua Vale and one at Swan Pool.
- (ix) that the two swimming clubs at Aqua Vale continued to be successfully and were working closer together than they had in the past.
- (x) that the two new five-a-side synthetic turf pitches at Aqua Vale were being well used, with the next peak season for use expected to be from this Autumn.
- (xi) that EA did not believe that the leisure centres had reached their footfall capacity. While they were certainly very busy at peak times, more would be done to encourage people to use the centres during off-peak periods.
- (xii) that it would be possible to provide Members with the minutes of the EA/AVDC contract performance meetings.
- (xiii) that the best and most cost effective energy management / environmental friendly technologies had been incorporated with the improvements made to both leisure centres. By their nature leisure centres used large amounts of energy however, the improvements at Aqua Vale had allowed the energy efficiency of the building to improve from 142 to 126 (within the 'F' band) over the last year or two.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the key outcomes and outputs achieved in the second year of the leisure management contract (2014/15) be noted.
- (2) Members extended their thanks and very best wishes to Christine Coppack who was leaving EA.

(Mrs Coppack having worked at Aqua Vale over the last 7 years and been instrumental in leading on many of the initiatives and improvements).

3. COUNCIL GRANTS PROGRAMME FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

AVDC had always provided grant funding to voluntary organisations in the District in various forms for example, project funding and/or support for the core costs of voluntary and community organisations delivering services. The current grant programmes included the Service Level Agreements with voluntary organisations; the Community Chest (in partnership with the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust); and the New Homes Bonus grant scheme for parish and town councils.

The Committee received a report on the grant funding programmes which included information on grants to voluntary and community sectors via SLAs in 2015/16 (Appendix 1), Community Chest grants April 2014 – March 2015 (Appendix 2) and New Homes Bonus grants awarded in 2013 and 2014 (Appendix 3).

Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

This grants programme had evolved over time and been subject to reviews in 2001 and 2008/9. The amount of money available for grant funding had reduced over time and the council currently allocated around £500,000 from its revenue budget, which provides funding for 18 voluntary and community sector organisations. Each organisation had a SLA with the council which outlined the services being supported by the funding, and the levels of service expected. These were monitored on a six monthly basis.

The funding subsidised a wide range of services, and enabled the recipients to attract additional funding for project work or service provision. One measure of the impact of the council's funding was known as the leverage ratio – i.e. the ratio of the amount of money attracted into the district to every pound 'invested' by the council. The leverage ratio for the council's SLA programme was currently 1:4. Since 2004 the SLA grants had been awarded as three year funding agreements, to provide the recipients with some stability in funding and to be able to plan for the medium term. The only exceptions to this had been where there may have been concerns over performance or the future viability of a service.

From 2013, in response to reductions in the council's grants budget and in anticipation of substantial cuts to Government funding, it was agreed to award two year agreements, with the option to extend for a third year, based on the budget available and satisfactory monitoring returns. Since then recipients have been provided with advice and information about how to reduce their reliance on AVDC funding. 2015/16 is the third year of the agreements and recipients will be asked to reapply this summer.

The application process required organisations to complete an application form and provide a range of supporting information including audited accounts, evidence of good governance, and monitoring information from previous years. In addition applicants were required to show how they were working towards reducing their reliance on AVDC funding.

The AVDC Grants Officer reviewed all of this information, and provided a summary to an informal grants panel. A scoring system was used to provide an indicative score to enable some comparison to be made between applicants. The informal grants

panel made recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Civic Amenities, who made the final decision on the allocation of funding. Membership of the Panel reflected the political makeup of the council and was currently Councillors Cartwright, Mrs Glover, Mills, Hunter-Watts and Mrs Ward.

Applicants were kept informed throughout the process and the final decision was communicated to them by the end of December, in order to provide three months notice of funding for the next financial year.

Aylesbury Vale Community Chest

The Community Chest was established in 2006, when the council transferred its housing stock to the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust. AVDC and VAHT agreed to set aside £500,000 each year, for ten years, made available from the VAT generated on the repairs and maintenance expenditure incurred by VAHT. As such, the scheme would operate until March 2017. Between May 2007 and the end of March 2015, £3.61m had been awarded through 626 grants.

A grants officer was employed on a part time basis to administer the Community Chest and provide advice and support to applicants. The full costs of administering the scheme was paid for from the Community Chest fund, leaving a grants budget of £460,000 p.a.

There were 3 grant streams, each of which required the applicant to complete an application form:-

- (i) Micro Grants – up to £1,000 were assessed and awarded on a monthly basis. Applications are assessed by the Grants Officer who made recommendations to the Chief Executives of AVDC and VAHT who made the final decision.

A short monitoring form was sent with the funding documentation for return within six weeks of the grant being spent. In 2014-15, 44 applications had been submitted, of which 42 were successful, a success rate of 95%. The 42 micro grants awarded totalled £35,776. The leverage ratio for those grants was £5.75 for every £1 granted.

- (ii) Project Grants – grants of up to £25,000 were available three times a year. Applications were assessed by a grants panel, which consisted of three AVDC Councillors and three officers from the Trust. From June 2015, panel members are Councillors Mrs Blake, Irwin and Powell representing AVDC and the Head of Finance, Director of People and Performance, and Head of Community Services from VAHT.

A detailed monitoring form is sent out one year after the grant was awarded, unless the grants officer was notified that the project had a different timescale. In 2014-15, 26 project applications had been considered by the panel, of which 21 were successful, this is an 81% success rate. The 21 project grants totalled £267,100. The leverage ratio for those grants was £8.81 for every £1 granted.

- (iii) Three Year Revenue Grants – Grants of up to £20,000 per year, for three years, were assessed by the grants panel. The final round of 3 year revenue grants had been awarded by the panel in 2013.

A mid-year monitoring visit was made by the grants officer, then a year-end monitoring return was submitted by each recipient, showing progress against targets set and including revised targets and budget for the following year. Satisfactory monitoring returns enabled the panel to approve the next year's

funding payment. 12 revenue grants had been awarded for 2014-17, a total of £157,000. The leverage ratio for these grants is £9.02 for every £1 granted.

In total, £459,876 of Community Chest grants had awarded during the year, contributing to investment in local voluntary and community sector projects worth £3.97m, an average leverage ratio of £8.64:£1.

The Grants Officer produced an annual report on the Community Chest, providing information about the grants awarded, which was available on the council's website at www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/communitychest. Full details about eligibility and criteria were also available using that link. The 2014/15 report would be available in August.

New Homes Bonus

The council received an annual New Homes Bonus allocation from central Government based on the number of properties added to the council tax base in the previous year, including new builds and empty properties being brought back into use. AVDC had agreed that 20% of the allocation would be set aside as an annual New Homes Bonus grant scheme to support parish and town councils affected by housing growth, and to allow projects to be delivered that would make a positive difference to Aylesbury Vale residents. The scheme had been running since 2013.

The application process required the submission of an expression of interest from the parish/town council, in order to prompt a conversation with the Grants Officer about the project, prior to a full application by 30 September. An informal grants panel considered applications and makes recommendations to the Cabinet, which made the final decision about funding. The grants panel included three district councillors and two parish representatives nominated by the Aylesbury Vale Association of Local Councils. Membership of the panel for 2015 is Councillors Strachan, Town and Lambert and two AVALC parish representatives, John Gilbey and Nick Heirons.

The amount of funding available for the scheme in 2015/16 was £938,000 plus £192,404 unallocated in 2014/15. In the first year of the grant scheme the total amount available was £491,000, and in 2014/15, a budget of £784,487 was available.

The NHB funding scheme was open to parish and town councils that could evidence that they have been affected by housing growth. Applications did not necessarily have to come from the area in which the growth has occurred, as it was recognised that those affected were not always within the area taking the growth. Turweston was a good example, where traffic from developments outside the village affected its residents.

To date no application has been refused, but some have been deferred pending further detail of the project.

Voluntary Sector Compact

This council had signed the Buckinghamshire Compact, an agreement between the statutory and voluntary sectors setting out a number of principles and good practice guidelines which both sectors had agreed to adopt, with particular commitments around funding and procurement, volunteering and consultation.

The council sought to comply with the Compact, particularly in relation to funding by providing multi-year funding agreements, and by keeping grant recipients informed

about all funding decisions. For example, the council always aimed to provide three months notice of decisions in relation to Service Level Agreements. In return it required evidence of good governance and regular monitoring information and the delivery and outcomes of the services provided by grant recipients.

Members requested further information and were informed:-

- (a) that information was not available on the gross value added as a result of the grant funding provided. While it was difficult for the voluntary sector, largely due to capacity issues, to measure this, the Council and partners were looking at how they might measure the social value of activities. The Council always encouraged organisations to monitor their activities and outcomes achieved.
- (b) that unallocated NHB was ring-fenced and carried forward to the next year.
- (c) that up to 100% of NHB projects and up to 50% of Community Chest projects could be funded through those grant schemes. The cut off date for expressions of interest for NHB projects this year was 30 September. While no NHB applications had been refused to date, some had been deferred pending further details of the project so Councils were encouraged to submit their EoI as soon as possible.
- (d) that the amount of SLAs had not increased over the last 6 years, i.e. had not been subject to an inflationary or annual increase. One or two organisations, i.e. the Multicultural Centre, Aylesbury and Aylesbury Dial A Ride had seen a reduction in their funding. Any decisions to change the level of funding were based on evidence / facts.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was provided with information including their Terms of Reference, current issues timetabled to be reported to the Committee, and a Recommendations Tracker (i.e. information monitoring recommendations and on the implementation of actions agreed at previous meetings), to assist Members in putting together a future work programme.

During discussions, it was agreed that the following items should be included onto the work programme:-

8 October 2015

- Waterside theatre – management contract review (including terms and conditions).
- Capital Programme.
- Equalities Report.
- Quarterly Finance Digest – April to June 2015.

16 November 2015

- Budget Setting (2016/17) report
- Business rates (general report), including information on rate relief available, what the Council can do to help local businesses.
- Quarterly Finance Digest – July to September 2015.

14 December 2015

- Budget Scrutiny – Cabinet’s initial proposals for 2016/17.

To be timetabled:

- Outcome of the pilot, Superfast Rural Broadband project.
- Business Case for Aylesbury Vale unitary status.
- Treasury Management Action Plan 2015-16 / Strategy for 2016/17.
- Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Report on how AVDC Councillors might be empowered to act and be recognised as community leaders.
- Services provided by local Citizen’s Advice Bureaus.

Members who had any further items of interest that they would like included on the future work programme were asked to provide the details to Democratic Services.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme of the scrutiny committee as discussed at the meeting be agreed.