

Scrutiny committee report

Report of head of economy leisure and property

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To: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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2013/14 Interim review of the Vale Council's satisfaction with Soll Vale

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee considers the Vale Council's satisfaction with Soll Vale's performance in delivering the leisure management contract for the period April to September 2013 at Faringdon and Wantage Leisure Centres and Tilsley Park.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The report considers the on-going organisational relationship in regard to the Vale of White Horse District Council's satisfaction with the performance of Soll Vale in providing the leisure management service for the Vale Council at Faringdon and Wantage Leisure Centres and Tilsley Park for the period 1 April 2013 to 30 September 2013.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2. The review of Soll Vale (Soll) helps ensure the Vale Council is achieving its strategic objectives in the following areas:
 - excellent delivery of key services: deliver high performing services with particular emphasis on ensuring good quality sports and leisure provision

- effective management of resources: reducing energy usage throughout the Vale Council's operations and continue to work in partnership with South Oxfordshire District Council to extend the sharing of services and all resources.

BACKGROUND

3. The Soll contract commenced on 1 September 2004 and ends on 31 August 2014. At the meeting of this committee on 25 July 2013 the cabinet member for economy, leisure and property was asked to provide an interim update on the Vale Council's satisfaction with Soll and also the information flow between officers and Soll staff in the first six months of the current reporting year, 2013/14.

MONITORING

4. Officers have continued to monitor the contract on a monthly basis. The monitoring regime has provided each leisure centre with four general routine inspections and two health and safety inspections. Each visit is unannounced and follows a detailed check list, which is completed by a monitoring officer during each visit. Areas that require immediate improvement are notified to the contractor before the officer leaves the site and a full report detailing all findings is issued to the contractor within two days of the inspection. An action plan is developed after each inspection with deadlines agreed between the Vale Council and Soll. Whilst there are always issues to deal with, there is co-operation between both organisations to achieve the desired outcomes.
5. This report is issued to the general manager of the facility that has been inspected, who is then accountable for distributing that information to the appropriate senior officers within Soll. On the same basis, the monitoring officer will report back on any exceptional items or areas where previously identified items have not been rectified, and these matters are then taken up by the facilities development (leisure) officer with the appropriate Soll counterpart.

INFORMATION FLOW

6. In addition to these inspections, there have been the normal monthly formal contractor / client meetings held at one of the centres where any relevant issues are discussed. Minutes of these meetings are taken and issued to all in attendance and are then agreed at the next meeting for accuracy and matters arising. These visits also allow for ad-hoc inspections to take place. There have also been two quarterly strategic meetings, which allow for medium to long-term issues to be discussed and planned for, although any important issues can be raised at any time and resolved should they arise. Again minutes are taken and distributed to all in attendance and agreed at the next meeting for accuracy and matters arising.
7. The strategic meetings are attended by the cabinet member for economy, leisure and property who fully participates in discussions relevant to the service and forward planning of the facilities and related activities. Also on a monthly basis, the cabinet member receives a briefing from the head of economy, leisure and property on issues of interest relating to the facilities team where any contractor-related issues are raised.
8. Within the range of these meetings there have been a variety of topics discussed covering all operational and strategic issues. To the officers' knowledge there are no instances where Soll is unaware of concerns or requirements to undertake works

and/or contribute to a particular process. Similarly, there have been no concerns raised by Soll over the Vale Council not providing feedback to Soll on any current or outstanding matters.

COUNCIL SATISFACTION

9. In response to this committee's request for the cabinet member for economy, leisure and property to update the committee on the Vale Council's satisfaction with Soll Vale; additional feedback has been sought from seven officers who have had interaction with members of the Soll team at many levels during the year so far. These officers provided scores that they considered were appropriate to the performance of the contractor only in the areas where they have direct knowledge of Soll's performance. The scores have been averaged out, to provide the overall council satisfaction score. An analysis of council satisfaction performance appears in annex A attached to this report. In a change to this process, officers who scored under three were asked to support their score by providing examples of why such a score was warranted.
10. The topics of discussion raised in the review of Soll's performance in 2012/13 that are not specifically repeated in annex A are considered to be improving or no longer of concern. Where necessary, officers continue to discuss any issues that they consider are in need of improvement as part of the on-going day to day working of the contract. This occurs in either the informal discussions on site or as part of more formal meetings.
11. In order to assist both organisations in understanding the evaluation process of the council satisfaction dimension, the strategic management teams from Soll and the Vale Council met in October 2013 to expand on issues and consider a way of better understanding concerns. The main outcome from this meeting is that the council satisfaction criteria will be discussed at each of the monthly client meetings to identify any failings and/or improvements each month that may affect an improved score for Soll. The first such meeting will be in November 2013. It is also likely that this item will continue to appear on future strategic meeting agendas and additional meetings will be arranged if the need arises.
12. Using the scoring matrix used in the full year's reporting process for reasons of consistency with previous assessments, and for fairness between contractors, the following is a rough guide to the assessment of contractors on council satisfaction:

Score	<3.0	3.0 – 3.399	3.4 – 3.899	3.9 – 4.299	4.3 – 5.0
Classification	Poor	Weak	Fair	Good	Excellent

13. The overall score achieved by Soll for council satisfaction for this half year process is 3.47, which compares to the full year's score of 3.4 for 2012/13 as a result of rounding up from 3.36. Using the scoring matrix in paragraph 12 above, this provides a classification of Fair, which is the same as the overall classification of Fair achieved in 2012/13 for a full year's operation.

Council satisfaction judgement **Fair**

Previous council satisfaction judgement for comparison **Fair**

STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

14. Annex A attached to this report records strengths and areas for improvement relating to the performance of the contractor over the last six months. Where performance is below expectations, the contract monitoring officer will agree an improvement plan with the contractor.

CONTRACTORS FEEDBACK

15. A key feature of the process for reviewing the performance of contractors is that the Vale Council provides them with an opportunity to give their feedback on the assessment, including suggestions for improvements to Vale Council processes. This is included in annex B attached to this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

CONCLUSION

18. The cabinet member for economy, leisure and property is confident that the on-going relationship with Soll is sound and that the flow of information between both organisations is as it should be to allow the contract to provide the level of service to customers that both organisations would expect.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- none.

Annex A - Council satisfaction

This assessment allows the Vale Council (as a client) to record its own satisfaction with aspects of a contractor's performance which lie outside Key Performance Targets and customer satisfaction. Each officer with direct knowledge and who frequently interacts with the contractor should complete this form. Questions can be left blank if not relevant to a contract or contractor.

Contractor / supplier / partner name

From (date) To

SERVICE DELIVERY

Attribute	(5) Very satisfied	(4) Satisfied	(3) Neither	(2) Dis-satisfied	(1) Very dissatsfd
1 Understanding of the client's needs		4			
2 Response time			3		
3 Delivers to time			3		
4 Delivers to budget		4			
5 Efficiency of invoicing				2	
6 Approach to health & safety		4			

COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONS

Attribute	(5) Very satisfied	(4) Satisfied	(3) Neither	(2) Dis-satisfied	(1) Very dissatsfd
7 Easy to deal with		4			
8 Communications / keeping the client informed			3		
9 Quality of written documentation			3		
10 Compliance with council's corporate identity		4			
11 Listening		4			
12 Quality of relationship		4			
13 Notifies council of organisational or operational change			3		

IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION

Attribute	(5) Very satisfied	(4) Satisfied	(3) Neither	(2) Dissatisfied	(1) Very dissatisfied
14 Offers suggestions beyond the scope of work			3		
15 Degree of innovation			3		
16 Goes the extra mile			3		
17 Supports the council's sustainability objectives		4			
18 Supports the council's equality objectives		4			
19 Degree of partnership working		4			

STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Strengths	Staff are helpful and generally willing to help
	Delivering KPT's
	The management team at Wantage has provided effective liaison for complex asbestos removal works at the centre, allowing the process to flow easily
	In general, the centre staff are very accommodating and helpful when visiting the centres for project works
Areas for improvement	There is a need for Soll to double check data and figures being issued out to ensure it is accurate, rather than the Vale Council having to identify the mistakes.
	There appears to be some inconsistency of approach to dealing with issues between centre management teams and the head office management teams. The speed of rectification of some aspects of the operation is not as responsive from the head office team as that of the centre-based teams. This may be a misunderstanding between the centre based teams and their decision making remit which needs clarification by Soll management
	There is a need to discuss potentially difficult or operational aspects of the service in advance of Soll making decisions in isolation of the Vale Council, especially in regard to the staffing of facilities and the longer term operational robustness of the Vale Council's facilities. Improve the speed of invoicing in terms of issuing invoices when they are due so that Soll are receiving money due to them at the appropriate time.

Annex B - Contractor 360° feedback

CONTRACTOR'S REACTION / FEEDBACK ON COUNCIL'S ASSESSMENT

The interim report has provided Soll with a timely and helpful insight into the Vale Officers view of our working relationship and welcomes the overall improvement in the score. However as previously discussed the feedback is provided as just a number with insufficient item specific comments as to how Soll may improve. Using an appraisal process as a reference this would mean that as an appraisee we know the direction of movement but not why the scoring has changed or what we need to do to improve. In this regard the process lacks vigour and transparency and has yet to be developed in to a useful feedback tool designed to drive excellence.

We note the low score for invoicing; Soll accepts that this can be done better and will monitor this closely to improve matters. Interestingly in the process of review of this work we discovered a late payment of an invoice by the Vale Property department reflecting the challenge that the Vale has in collating information between departments.

Soll has agreed with Chris Webb that the scoring will be added to the agenda of our monthly Client meetings with a view to under standing the “why” and “what” needs to be done to improve. I understand that this process will likely be hampered by getting regular timely feedback from the other 6 officers involved. It is important that feedback is timely and evidenced based.

Soll has an ambition to be able to score at least a “good” at the next scrutiny review. As discussed the challenge for the Vale is for each item scored to be evidenced and to able to show that they have communicated what a 5 “would look like” such that for any gap identified Soll can put together an improvement plan. Anything less will not empower the partnership to fulfil paragraph 1&2 of the report.

ANY AREAS WHERE CONTRACTOR DISAGREES WITH ASSESSMENT

WHAT COULD / SHOULD THE COUNCIL DO DIFFERENTLY TO ENABLE THE CONTRACTOR TO DELIVER THE SERVICE MORE EFFICIENTLY / EFFECTIVELY / ECONOMICALLY?

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Feedback provided by	Adrian Bidwell Head of Operations
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Date	5 November 2013
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