

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 18th October, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Hulme, Mann and Pantelic (from 6.43pm)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Brooker, Gahir and Muvvala

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Akram

PART 1

33. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

34. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th September 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20th September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

35. Library Services Consultation

The Lead Member for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills gave a presentation on the proposal to commence a public consultation on the future delivery of library services.

The Cabinet considered and noted the Library Services Needs Assessment in the Appendix Pack and the final consultation questions in the Supplementary Agenda.

(Councillor Pantelic joined the meeting)

Library services were a statutory service delivered under the legal duty in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Council was required to ensure the service was fit for the future, affordable and remained comprehensive and efficient. It was noted that if no changes were made to how library services were delivered there was a significant financial risk to the Council as the current service was not affordable. The Lead Member emphasised that the Cabinet wanted to hear the view of residents, including both current users and those that currently did not use library services. The feedback to the consultation would inform any future decisions on the service. The consultation asked consultees for their views on their preferred future models or alternative ideas. The five models set out in the consultation were:

1. Reduce the money available to spend on buying publications (both hard copy and eResources).

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2. Keep all the main library buildings open but reduce the opening and staffed hours at Langley and Cippenham and reduce the staffed hours at The Curve and Britwell libraries.
3. Close both Langley and Cippenham library buildings but maintain the staffing and opening hours at The Curve library and at Britwell library.
4. Keep all library buildings but reduce the hours they are open, the hours they are staffed, and the space dedicated to the library. Attract other users to rent space in the library building alongside the reduced library (co-location).
5. Move all library services out of the current main library buildings and re-locate services to be delivered from a range of other locations (and on-line) across the borough.

The Cabinet discussed the impacts of the Covid pandemic on libraries and the fact that library services needed to constantly evolve as the growth of the internet had changed the demand for traditional library services. It would be important that the consultation explored the future needs and demands for services. Lead Members commented that Slough had continued to invest in its libraries in recent years and Slough was considered to have good library provision.

Members highlighted the importance of aligning any future decisions on library services with the Council's localities strategy. There may be opportunities to bring services together in certain buildings which would help to offset costs. Libraries were important social spaces and the review would need to capture the wider benefits and value to local communities.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Brooker asked when it was expected library services would fully reopen after the Covid restrictions. The Director of Place & Community commented that the reopening of services was taking place subject to risk assessments and in line with Government guidance.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Muvvala expressed concern about the potential closure of the Langley library building and asked whether an option could be added to the consultation to expand library provision. The Leader provided assurance that the starting point of the consultation was not to close buildings but that it was important to consult on all the options and listen to the responses to the consultation. The review provided an opportunity to assess future needs and that could potentially include changing the opening times and more digital or specialist services.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed the recommendations, including to commence a public consultation to begin later in October.

Resolved –

- (a) That the contents of the Library Services Needs Assessment 2021 set out in Appendix A to the report and the recommendations contained within it be noted.
- (b) That the options for future Library Service delivery set out in paragraph 4 Appendix C of the report be agreed.
- (c) That a public consultation on the future delivery of library services, as set out in Appendices C and D to the report be agreed (noting that a revised version of Appendix D had been published in a Supplementary Agenda).
- (d) That Delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Customer and Communities, following consultation with the Lead Member for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills and the Lead Member for Leisure, Culture & Communities to undertake the consultation and prepare a final business case for the future delivery of library services.
- (e) That it be noted that a report would be brought back to Cabinet in Quarter 4 of 2021/22 recommending a proposal for the future delivery of library services.

36. Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Lead Member for Sustainable Transport & the Environment introduced a report that sought approval of the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for submission to the Department for Transport (DfT) by 31st October 2021.

The submission of the BSIP was an important first step in the Council’s response to the National Bus Strategy and provided opportunities to improve services, for example by being able to access DfT funding and develop an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators in Slough.

The overall requirement was to establish and commit to a joint plan with operators to improve the reliability and quality of services, increase bus passenger levels and improve bus passenger satisfaction. The Lead Member commented that bus fares were relatively high in Slough and it was hoped the Council could work closely with bus companies in the partnership to address the issue.

The report set out the general principles for the BSIP and would enable the development of an Enhanced Partnership Plan which would contain much more detail and proposals for specific schemes. All future projects would be subject to feasibility and the availability of funding and it was proposed the EPP would be presented to Cabinet for approval before progressing any schemes. The full plan would be required by March 2022.

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The Cabinet welcomed the plan and emphasised its commitment to promote public transport and other sustainable forms of travel, including through bus and cycle lane provision. The impact of Covid-19 on bus usage was noted and it was expected to take time for usage to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Members asked whether bus operators were working constructively with the Council on BSIP and Officers responded that there was a commitment to work together and three partnership meetings had already been held. The bus priority measures put in place by the Council had been welcomed by bus operators as a vital pre-requisite to improving the reliability, and potentially the frequency of services in the future. Improved information, use of technology and multi-operator ticketing were all areas that would be explored in the short term to identify improvements that could be delivered.

Lead Members asked a number of specific questions about local services and routes, including to Heathrow, and Officers responded to the points raised. It was expected that services negatively impacted by reduced demand would be restored as the economy recovered. The partnership would provide a platform to review the network in the future.

After due consideration the Cabinet approved the recommendations and draft BSIP.

Resolved –

- (a) That the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan be approved.
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director - Place and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for Sustainable Transport and the Environment, to:
 - i. approve the final version of the BSIP and submit this to the DfT,
 - ii. subject to approval of the BSIP, commence preparation of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPP).
- (c) That it be noted that a report would be presented to Cabinet for approval of the EPP.

37. Professional Services Framework (Place)

The Associate Director of Place, Strategy introduced a report that sought approval to develop a four year Framework Agreement of Architect/Design led Professional Services.

The framework would be for internal use within the Council but was principally targeted at Housing Revenue Account developments, General Fund work coming through the Place Delivery team and the Highways and Planning teams. The arrangement would provide access to relevant consultants and support. The Framework Agreement would provide a cost effective route to procure essential consultancy services and helped to manage a variable

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workload in a manner not possible through in-house provision. It was noted that a similar agreement had been in place between 2014 and 2018.

The Cabinet supported the proposal, subject to amending recommendation (d) to require consultation with the relevant Lead Members on the appointment of suppliers. Members also commented on the importance of ensuring clear key performance indicators were in place and monitored. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the development and introduction of a four year professional services framework to enable the cost effective procurement of essential consultants across a range of services be approved.
- (b) That it be noted that as part of the procurement exercise, Officers will publish the notice in the Find a Tender to invite Expressions of interest from Suppliers wishing to tender.
- (c) That it be noted that having followed and satisfied all the legal, regulatory and statutory requirements the framework agreement is set to commence in 2022 and run for a period of 4 years (the maximum period for a Framework).
- (d) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Place, following consultation with the relevant Lead Member(s), to approve the appointment of suppliers to the award of the Professional Services Framework agreement.

38. Covid-19 Decisions Update

Details of the significant decisions taken by officers were noted by the Cabinet and ratified insofar as they related to Executive functions, as set out in Appendix A to the report.

Resolved – That the decisions in Appendix A to the report be noted and ratified insofar as they related to Executive functions.

39. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The comments of the Place Scrutiny Panel in relation to the Bus Service Improvement Plan were considered earlier in the meeting.

A reference from the Place Scrutiny Panel meeting on 28th September regarding asset disposals would be considered by the Cabinet in a report to November Cabinet.

There were no further references from Overview & Scrutiny.

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40. Notification of Key Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Key Decisions published on 17th September 2021 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by Cabinet over the next three months.

Resolved – That the published Notification of Key Decisions be endorsed.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)