

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 18th March, 2024.

Present:- Councillors Smith (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), I. Ahmed, Bedi, Kelly, Manku, Muvvala and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART 1

108. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

109. Minutes of the Meetings held on 26th February and 5th March 2024

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 26th February 2024 and 5th March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

110. Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2024 - 2029

The Lead Member for the Environment, Environmental Services and Open Spaces introduced a report that sought approval of the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) Strategy 2024 – 2029.

The Strategy was a requirement of the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) grant funding scheme. Officers were preparing an application for April 2024 to claim the allocated £2.233m capital grant funding for installation of EVCI to primarily serve residents without the ability to charge at home. Slough had not previously had any detailed operational strategy or policy for the deployment and management of EV charging infrastructure and the document as at Appendix A to the report set out the proposed strategy.

The Cabinet recognised that reducing emissions from the transport sector was a key part of the UK Government's Net Zero ambitions and the shift towards electric vehicles would help address the significant air quality issues in the town. Lead Members agreed that the authority had a role in taking a strategic view to ensure a balanced public charging network in the town that did not just serve the most commercially viable locations but provided an equitable network for residents and businesses. As highway authority and a major landowner, the Council was ideally placed to work with the private sector charge point providers to boost the availability of charging closer to residential areas that need it.

A number of questions were asked about the match funding arrangements and how the Council would work with the private sector to deliver the strategy. Members also commented that the Council could take steps to promote the fact that Slough already had one of the highest levels of EV

Cabinet - 18.03.24

charging points in the country. At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the EVCI Strategy 2024 – 2029 as set out in Appendix A be approved.
- (b) That the British Vehicle Renting & Leasing Association (BVRLA) Fleet Pledge at Figure 2 be adopted.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Housing & Environment, in consultation with the S.151 Officer and the Lead Member for the Environment, Environmental Services and Open Spaces, to approve submission of the Stage 2 & 3 funding applications under the LEVI scheme.
- (d) That the addition of new capital programmes of up to £5 million in connection with the LEVI scheme be approved, on the basis that all expenditure was covered by external grant and third-party funding.
- (e) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Housing & Environment, in consultation with the Lead Member for the Environment, Environmental Services and Open Spaces, to commence the process for commissioning suppliers for EVCI using a compliant procurement route.
- (f) That it be agreed to delegate the decision to award and enter into the contract(s) to the Executive Director – Regeneration, Housing & Environment, in consultation with the S.151 Officer and the Lead Member for Environment, Environmental Services & Open Spaces, subject to the funding being available from the LEVI grant and match funding from the private sectors.
- (g) That it be noted that a report would be brought to Cabinet by 31st December 2024 to update on the application under the LEVI Scheme and the procurement of EVCI.

111. Energy Contracts

The Lead Member for Finance, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenues & Benefits introduced a report on the proposed arrangements for the purchase of energy contracts.

The wholesale energy markets had stabilised after two years of significant price fluctuations due to global factors including the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The wholesale cost of energy had fallen by more than 50% over the past 12 months. The Council was entering into the final year of its flex and fixed rate energy contracts which would all expire on 31st March 2025. To limit the Council's exposure to potential future energy price fluctuations during

Cabinet - 18.03.24

2024/25 and to provide an opportunity to obtain additional market value, the Cabinet was requested to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Housing and Environment to purchase energy below an approved cap price and to approve the procurement of new energy contracts to start on 1st April 2025 for a 3-year period.

The Cabinet considered the options and noted that the proposed approach sought to manage and balance the risks at a time of potential future price volatility. It was noted that whilst the wholesale price had fallen over the past year, it was significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels and remained unpredictable. Lead Members therefore agreed the recommended strategy and delegations to seek to achieve the best price in the market and secure best value for the Council. A report would come back to Cabinet by the end of 2024 on the contracts for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

Resolved –

- i. That the Gas & Electricity Risk Management Strategy (Appendix A) be adopted and approved as follows:
 - a. Approved the purchase of electricity on a 'month ahead' basis and gas on a 'day ahead' basis on the open wholesale energy market price.
 - b. Set wholesale energy market price caps for power for the summer 24 period (April 24 to September 24) to £90/MWh and the winter 24 (October 24 to March 25) to £110/MWh.
 - c. Set wholesale energy market price caps for gas for the summer 24 period (April 24 to September 24) to £35 MWh and the winter 24 (October 24 to March 25) to £40/MWh.
 - d. If the wholesale energy markets price increase such that the cap is expected to be exceeded, or is exceeded, then Cabinet approves the purchase strategy for energy to buy the remaining energy volume in that summer and/or winter period to limit further cost exposure.
- ii. That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Housing and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial (the S151 officer) and the Lead Member (Financial oversight, council assets, procurement, and revenues and benefits) to purchase energy in line with the Gas & Electricity Risk Management Strategy.
- iii. That the compliant procurement of new energy supply contracts with an estimated contract value between £8m and £11m for the period 25/26, 26/27 and 27/28 be approved. The procurement would be based on the most competitive price, supplier performance, bill validation and meter services, and flexibility to amend volume to align with the Estate Strategy. Council officers would be required to report back to Cabinet by 31st December

2024 and seek approval to award new energy contracts for the period 25/26 – 27/28.

112. Microsoft Licencing: Upgrade from Tier E3 to Tier E5

The Lead Member for Customer Service, Resident Engagement, Digital, Data and Technology introduced a report that proposed upgrading the existing Microsoft E3 licence to an E5 licence.

The current E3 software licence covered a range of cyber security services such as antivirus and malware; and productivity tools for staff including Teams, Word, Excel and Outlook. The proposed upgrade to E5 would allow the Council to access a wider range of services which could deliver improvements to residents and staff. The cost of the upgrade was approximately £230,000 each year and the costs would be partly offset by not renewing two existing contracts for services which would become available through the upgraded E5 licence.

In response to a number of questions from Lead Members about whether the Council was achieving best value through the proposal it was confirmed that it was a subscription based contract which adjusted to the staffing levels of the Council. The ICT team had worked closely with procurement officers to secure the best deal for the Council. The Lead Member for finance confirmed his agreement to the recommendations, but asked for a separate meeting with ICT officers to discuss the upgrade in more detail.

The Cabinet noted that the Chair of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee had agreed the request to grant a call-in waiver to enable the decision to be implemented urgently and avoid the higher renewal costs after March 2024. After due consideration the Cabinet agreed the recommendations and that they could be implemented urgently.

Resolved –

- (a) That the upgrade of the council's Microsoft software licencing from tier E3 to tier E5 at an increased approximate annual cost of £230,000 for three years, totalling £690,000 be approved; and
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the executive director for strategy and improvement, in consultation with the Cabinet member for customer service, resident engagement, digital, data and technology, to approve and sign the contract amendment.

113. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Update

The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the actions taken to address the priorities

Cabinet - 18.03.24

identified by Ofsted and the CQC in their inspection report from 2021 as well as the key information from the December monitoring report for the Safety Valve Agreement / High Needs Deficit Recovery Plan. The report sought to ensure that Cabinet members are fully informed about the Council's special educational needs (SEND) improvement journey and was able to offer appropriate support and challenge.

The Cabinet was informed that there was clear evidence of increased pace in completing the individual actions since the new Improvement Action Plan was agreed in June 2023. The backlog of Educational Psychology assessments had been cleared and the backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans was beginning to reduce slowly. It was recognised that the improvements were from a low base and there was significant further progress needed to reach a good level of service. Some of the challenges to service improvement included maintaining a stable team of case officers and it was noted that five officers had recently given notice, although managers were confident on the basis of the recruitment process underway that new officers would be joining who could take the organisation to the next stage of its SEND improvement journey.

Lead Members welcomed the update and thanked the Executive Director for Children's Services and staff for the work they had done to contribute to the turnaround of the service. It was proposed and agreed that an annual update be provided to Cabinet in the next municipal year, with the Lead Member receiving more regular updates. This was agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress made as set out in the body of the report be noted.
- (b) That it be agreed that that from the next municipal year, an annual update report would be provided to Cabinet on the SEND improvements, with the Lead Member receiving more regular updates on progress.

114. Individual Placement Support Grants

The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services introduced a report on a new Supported Employment Programme, 'Ability Slough', grant which would help residents with a disability access and/or remain in employment. Ability Slough was funded from a Department of Work and Pensions Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care (IPSPC) grant until March 2025.

The programme would provide bespoke guidance and support to adult residents who have a formal or informal/self-diagnosis of a disability including mental illness and/or physical disability. The support would include skills training, work coaching and help to stay in work (including working directly with local employers). Slough Borough Council would be the lead authority for the programme in Berkshire.

Cabinet - 18.03.24

The Cabinet welcomed the grant and the support the programme would provide to Slough residents. Only 41 upper-tier authorities in England had received the IPSPC grant. Lead Members commented on the need to align the programme to the Council's wider activities in relation to apprenticeship and skills projects. After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care grant from Department of Work and Pensions be accepted. The total grant award was £4,585,252.31 (for the two financial years of the grant, with delivery period July 2023 to March 2025).
- (b) That the delivery of the Supported Employment Programme (Ability Slough) funded by the Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care grant (Department of Work and Pensions) as outlined in Appendix 1 be agreed.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Director Adult Services and the Lead Member (Education and Children's Services), to procure a provider for delivery of the programme and award a contract to the successful bidder.
- (d) That the Individual Placement and Support (Substance Use) (IPSSU) grant from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) of £805,834 for a delivery period of 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026 across all six Berkshire local authorities be accepted. (Figures exclude an uplift for 2025/26 to be advised by OHID).
- (e) That it be agreed that Slough Borough Council should be the lead authority for the IPSSU grant and delegate authority to the Executive Director Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member (Education and Children's), to enter into an inter authority agreement with the other Berkshire local authorities.

115. Children and Young People's (Placement) Sufficiency Strategy - update

The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services introduced a report the updated the Cabinet on the Children and Young People's Placement Sufficiency Strategy that had been approved by Cabinet in November 2023.

The Council had a duty to ensure that its children in care had suitable accommodation within the local authority's area that met the needs of children. It was noted that since July 2023 four children had stepped down from foster care, returning home following a 'Placement with Parent' assessment and support package in place. Five fostering households had been approved during the financial year include two since approval of the

Cabinet - 18.03.24

strategy in November. There had been a net increase in the overall number of fostering households from 45 to 47 and further applications were in progress.

The Executive Director, Children's Services stated that the report reflected the good practice being undertaken and provided assurance that Slough Children First was achieving the savings as identified within the SCF Business and Improvement Plan.

The update was noted.

Resolved – That the update on the implementation of the Children & Young People's Placement Sufficiency Strategy be noted.

116. Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers, including benefits of Fostering Friendly Employer status

The Lead Member for Education and Children's Services introduced a report on the steps the Council has and could continue to take to recruit and retain foster carers to ensure Slough's looked after children had safe and secure homes. The steps recommended in the report were aligned to the Children and Young People's Placement Sufficiency Strategy.

Reviewing and increasing the support available to foster carers would help recruit and retain them and meet current and future needs of children requiring foster placements. One of the proposals was for the Council to apply for Fostering Friendly Employer status. The Leader of the Council thanked foster carers in Slough and highlighted the Cabinet's commitment to supporting them in the vital role they played in the town.

The recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the submission of an application for the Council to be granted Fostering Friendly Employer status be agreed.
- (b) That the steps being taken by Slough Children First Ltd to be granted Fostering Friendly Employer status be noted.
- (c) That the wider steps being taken to increase recruitment and retention of foster carers, including encouraging other local employers to adopt Fostering Friendly Employer policies and status be noted.

117. Disposal of Land at Uxbridge Road - Site of Former Rochfords Youth Hostel

The Lead Member for Finance, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenues & Benefits introduced a report that sought approval for the disposal of land at Uxbridge Road, the site of the former Rochfords Youth Hostel, in accordance

Cabinet - 18.03.24

with the Council's Asset Disposal Strategy. The site was a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset.

The Cabinet considered the Part II appendix that set out details of the disposal during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The proposed sale had been subject to due diligence and reflected best consideration reasonably obtainable for the disposal. The site had been declared surplus by the Cabinet Committee in January 2023 and further approval was now required to proceed with the recommended offer for a freehold disposal to a developer purchaser. The former youth hostel had been demolished several years ago and the site was vacant. The sales process was summarised and the preferred bidder was seeking to purchase the site with a view to bringing forward a residential led scheme. The site was in a poor state and attracted fly tipping.

After due consideration, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations to dispose of the site.

Resolved –

- (a) That the site be declared surplus to housing requirements.
- (b) That the Council sale of Land at Uxbridge Road – Site of former Rochfords Youth Hostel as shown on Appendix 2 to the bidder named in Appendix 1 be agreed.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Property, Planning and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to negotiate the terms of and enter into the contract and any associated documentation in connection with the disposal consistent with the disposal report and Heads of Terms appended at Confidential Appendix 1.

118. Disposal of Former Police Station, High Street, Langley, Slough

The Lead Member for Finance, Council Assets, Procurement and Revenues & Benefits introduced a report that sought approval for the disposal of a vacant site – the former Police Station, High Street, Langley. The site was held as a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset.

The Cabinet considered the Part II appendix that set out details of the disposal during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The site was considered to be surplus to housing requirements and by disposing of the site the cost of maintenance of the land would no longer fall to the HRA and a capital receipt would be generated. Due diligence had

Cabinet - 18.03.24

taken place and the proposed sale reflected best consideration reasonably obtainable for the asset. The site history was summarised and it was noted that whilst the Cabinet had received reports several years ago about potential uses of the site for housing and community facilities it was noted that the current, approved HRA Capital Programme did not include any redevelopment costs for the site.

The Cabinet noted the process undertaken to market and dispose of the site. The preferred bidder was buying the property as a development led opportunity and was likely to seek residential led options for the site. A Lead Member commented that the future development needed to properly address any residents concerns about parking and waste issues and it was responded that these issues would be matters for the planning process.

After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the site be declared as surplus to housing requirements.
- (b) Agree to the Council sale of the site referred to in Appendix 1 and known as the Former Police Station, High Street Langley to the bidder named in Appendix 1.
- (c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Property, Planning and Housing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to negotiate the terms of and enter into the contract and any associated documentation in connection with the disposal consistent with the disposal report and Heads of Terms appended at Confidential Appendix 1.

119. References from Scrutiny

There were no references from scrutiny.

120. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information, therefore it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

121. Disposal of Land at Uxbridge Road - Site of Former Rochfords Youth Hostel - Appendix

Resolved – That the Part II appendix be noted.

122. Disposal of Former Police Station, High Street, Langley, Slough - Appendix

Cabinet - 18.03.24

Resolved – That the Part II appendix be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.45 pm and closed at 7.50 pm)