

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 21st November, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Munawar (Chair), Hussain (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bal, Matloob, Sharif and Sohal

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Bains, Chaudhry, Morris, Nazir, Rasib, A Sandhu, Shah, Swindlehurst and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART 1

62. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bal declared that his daughter worked for Slough Borough Council.

63. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th October 2016

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th October 2016 be approved as a correct record.

Minute 57 – Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2016-2046

The Interim Strategic Director, Regeneration, Housing and Resources informed the Cabinet that resolution (f) relating to the policy on rents on new build homes had not yet been implemented. This was to allow the Council to consider the implications of a recent court case potentially impacting on the lettings policy and allocations scheme. It was anticipated that these policies would come back to Members for approval following the review. The decision on differential rents had been called-in to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which in view of the delay in implementation had decided to defer detailed consideration of the rents policy until its meeting in January.

64. Financial Report - Q2 2016/17

The Leader of Council introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the latest quarter 2 forecast financial information for the 2016-17 year.

The Cabinet welcomed Neil Wilcox, the newly appointed Assistant Director Finance & Audit to his first Cabinet meeting. It was noted that the finance report would in future be considered on a monthly basis by the Cabinet and the performance report would be quarterly. Work was underway to redesign the performance report and it was anticipated that this would come to the January Cabinet meeting.

The Assistant Director reported that the forecast overspend had increased to £1.6m since the most recent report to Cabinet. In addition to the previously reported pressure of £1m on the Adult Social Care budget, an overspend of

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£423k was reported in Assets, Infrastructure and Regeneration arising from lower than budgeted asset acquisition income and £470k in the Highways and Environment Service due to the impact of homelessness pressures on temporary accommodation costs. Work was ongoing to reduce the forecast overspend by year end and the Cabinet would consider further proposals to increase income through the strategic acquisitions fund later on the agenda. The forecast net capital outturn was £73.5m against the total capital programme for the 2016/17 of £106.5m. The Housing Revenue Account was showing a surplus of £0.4m.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Anderson suggested that the annual budget forecast comparison chart in section 6.2 of the report be rebased to exclude historic children's services budget information to enable a like for like comparison with previous years. He expressed concern that the chart showed the level of overspend was still rising at Month 6 compared to previous years when it was generally reducing. The Assistant Director commented that the overspend was below the level at the same stage in 2015/16 and that it was expected that the measures taken would bring start to reduce the overspend over the coming months.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet agreed to note the report.

Resolved – That the current financial forecast and the ongoing work by departments to reduce the overspend be noted.

65. Draft Housing Strategy for Slough

The Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal summarised the draft Housing Strategy 2016-2021. The Cabinet was asked to approve the draft as the basis of consultation with residents, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and other stakeholders before coming back to Members for final approval.

The strategy set out the priorities, opportunities and challenges for housing in Slough and had been developed alongside the preparatory work for the Local Plan. There were five themes in the strategy – new housing supply, private sector, council homes, homelessness and housing need and special needs and vulnerable groups. The key features of the action plan included enabling the provision of 927 new housing units per year in line with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment; a commitment that the Council deliver an average of 200 housing units per year over the life of the strategy, including affordable housing; a rigorous enforcement regime and, where necessary prosecutions, against rogue landlords; an end to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children and additional measures to meet the housing needs of care leavers and up to three extra care schemes.

The draft would be subject to a consultation exercise in December and January. Commissioners emphasised the importance of ensuring the consultation was comprehensive and inclusive, and some of the detailed plans were noted including a housing conference and an additional meeting of

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the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 20th December. The Cabinet commented on a number of aspects of the draft including the balance between supporting the majority of responsible landlords in the borough whilst addressing the problem of rogue landlords; the impacts of population growth and major infrastructure projects on housing affordability; and the actions in themes 4 and 5 to support vulnerable people. The commitment to end the placement of children with families in bed and breakfast accommodation was welcomed and the Commissioner stated that the target was that no families would be in B&Bs by March 2017.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillors Morris and Swindlehurst made a number of comments on various aspects of draft strategy which the Interim Strategic Director responded to in detail. The issues raised included the clarity of the vision for tenants on the options appraisal for the Council housing stock; governance of the proposed housing companies; consultation arrangements; housing for care leavers; consistency with the Local Plan on housing numbers; the proposed landlord registration scheme; funding for new council homes and the balance of tenures. The Leader encouraged Members to actively contribute to the development of the strategy through the consultation process.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet agreed to approve the draft Housing Strategy for consultation.

Resolved –

- (a) That the draft Housing Strategy 2016-2021 be approved.
- (b) That the Strategy be issued for consultation with residents, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and other stakeholders.
- (c) That the Strategy be brought back to Cabinet after the consultation for final approval.

66. Approval of Local Plan Issues and Options Document

The Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal and the Planning Policy Lead Officer introduced a report that sought approval of the Local Plan Issues and Options document that would be the subject of a six week period of public consultation. It was emphasised that the document at Appendix A to the report was designed to stimulate discussion and was not a draft plan. A shorter version would be produced for public engagement.

The Cabinet noted the major strategic issues identified in the report which included Slough's growing, young and dynamic population; providing the 927 dwellings a year of the Objectively Assessed Housing Need; the creation of 15,000 additional jobs; how the town centre could be revitalised; getting the maximum benefits out of the growth of Heathrow airport and mitigating any adverse environmental effects; and maintaining Slough's position as an 'economic powerhouse'. The report set out the possible ways in which the

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Local Plan could address these issues and included a number of strategic 'spatial options' to put forward for public consultation. It was noted that even if all of these options came forward, Slough would still be 8,000 houses short of meeting the identified housing need over time, hence the options of expanding Slough or building elsewhere were being promoted but could only be achieved with the agreement of relevant authorities. It was a requirement to have a new Local Plan in place and although there was some uncertainty about the timescale for Slough in view of the proposed Heathrow expansion and co-ordination with neighbouring authorities.

Commissioners welcomed the progress that had been made and asked that the consultation be as simple as possible for people to engage with given the range and complexity of the issues involved. A communications plan was in place and whilst social media would be used to raise awareness of the consultation, people would need to comment through the website and other formal mechanisms. The option of introducing a congestion charge had been highlighted locally and it was clarified that the Issues and Options document was a discussion document setting all of the options over a twenty year period. It was confirmed that there was no immediate proposal to introduce such a scheme but it was an option in the long term if it was considered to be the right solution given the forecast growth of the town.

Councillors Wright, Bains, Swindlehurst, Hussain and Swindlehurst spoke raised a number of issues under Rule 30 including:

- The need to ensure a balanced approach be taken on the provision of new housing to ensure more family homes were provided to help people stay in Slough.
- The plan should be realistic on the supply of new homes and the numbers should be consistent with the draft housing strategy.
- The release of green belt land needed to be very carefully considered and not given up without clear local support.
- The inclusion of controversial issues such as a congestion charge and green belt release risked distracting from the other major issues in the document.

The Leader thanked Members for their contributions and emphasised that the publication of the Issues and Options document was the starting point for wider consultation. He encouraged them to provide these views through the consultation process.

The Cabinet agreed that the draft Issues and Options document be approved for consultation.

Resolved –

- (a) That the draft Issues and Options Document for the Review of the Local Plan for Slough (2016-2036) be approved for public consultation, with delegated powers to Officers, following consultation with the

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Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal, to make any necessary minor changes prior to publication.

- (b) That delegated powers be granted to Officers, following consultation with the Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal, to publish a Local Development Scheme setting out a timetable for the Review of the Local Plan for Slough.
- (c) That delegated powers be granted to Officers, following consultation with the Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal, to publish a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) setting out how the Councils stakeholders and community would be involved in preparation of Planning Policy documents.

67. Tackling Empty Private Sector Housing

The Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal introduced a report that sought Cabinet approval to take proactive and effective enforcement actions to deal with long term empty and derelict properties. Bringing such properties back into use would both improve the neighbourhood for local residents and bring back into use much needed housing stock. A separate report in Part II of the agenda sought approval to use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for seven properties.

The Cabinet was supportive of the action being taken to tackle this issue and sought assurance that reasonable steps had been taken with owners prior to the use of such powers. It was confirmed that CPO were a last resort and Officers sought to work with property owners wherever possible to bring homes back into use. It was noted that such powers had not been used by the Council for some years. Contact details had been published for residents to make the Council aware of other properties that could be considered for similar action.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Swindlehurst welcomed the use of the available powers and highlighted previous decision taken to limit Council Tax reliefs for empty properties. He also encouraged the Cabinet to take action on the issue of unoccupied dwellings which accounted for more properties than those empty and derelict.

The Cabinet agreed the approach being taken to bring empty properties back into use.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Council's Housing Regulation Team use all available powers including, but not limited to, Compulsory Purchase Powers, Part 4 of the Housing Act 2004 and the Relevant Town & Planning Act 1990 to bring long term empty derelict properties back into use .

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- (b) That The CPO report in Part II of the agenda, which sought approval to use Compulsory Purchase Power to deal with seven long term empty properties, be noted.

68. Digital and Customer Transformation Programme

The Commissioner for Digital Transformation and Customer Care introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the 'define' phase of the digital transformation programme and sought approval for resources for the design phase.

The programme had a wide range of potential benefits to residents and services users, for example by improving the Council's digital offer to be fully mobile and accessible; to businesses, by making it easier to manage business rates or regulatory services; and to the Council by driving revenue savings and understanding customers better to improve the design of services. Commissioners recognised that the design phase was crucial in achieving these benefits and it therefore considered the request for £625k of invest-to-save funding to support this activity. The Cabinet supported the vision of making the Council a leading digital organisation and wanted the programme to move forward quickly to begin to achieve the benefits as quickly as possible, particularly given the need for the redesign of some services and the rapid changes in technology and its use. It was expected that after six months a business case would be ready and the anticipated level of revenue savings was between 18% and 35%.

The Cabinet approved the resources required to progress with the design phase of the scheme.

Resolved – That Officers be instructed (subject to Capital Strategy Board approval) to commence the recruitment of the Programme Team and the Design Phase of the Digital and Customer Transformation Programme at an estimated cost of £625k. This was an invest-to-save bid for pump-prime funding to support delivering the outcomes of the 5-year plan and Revenue savings in the range of 18% to 35%.

69. Proposed Strategic Acquisition Strategy

The Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal introduced a report that sought approval to recommend to full Council an additional £25m from the capital programme to the strategic acquisition fund to secure land and/or investment assets that improved the Council's financial resilience and brought forward sites to contribute to the regeneration of the borough. It was also proposed to amend the scoring criteria associated with out-of-borough investment assets.

The Strategic Acquisitions Strategy had been agreed in September 2015 with an initial capital budget of £25m. A total of £13.6m had been spent generating additional gross income of £596,775 for 2016/17. A further £9.2m

had been set aside for anticipated pipeline acquisitions in the current financial year leaving a balance of £2.2m. It was therefore proposed that a further £25m be added to the fund to build the portfolio and secure further revenue for the Council. Acquisitions were normally made within the borough, however, there was some flexibility to purchase out-of-borough investment assets to create a balanced portfolio and maximise financial returns. Under the current scoring criteria for proposed acquisitions, the minimum score would normally be 240 out of 400 (60%). It was proposed that out-of-borough acquisitions should score a minimum of 300 out of 400 (75%).

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillors Swindlehurst and Anderson asked about the slowdown in recent months in securing assets in the pipeline and about the risk of rising borrowing costs post-Brexit. It was responded that there had been a market slowdown after Brexit but activity was picking up and a number of acquisitions were moving forward. Each acquisition had a robust business case and a long term view was taken before any asset was purchased.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet agreed to recommend to full Council on 29th November that an additional £25m of capital be made available to the fund and that the scoring criteria be amended as set out in paragraphs 5.13 to 5.15 of the report.

Recommended –

- (a) That it be agreed that whilst strategic acquisitions would normally be made within the Borough of Slough, to reduce risk, maximise financial returns and widen the potential to create a more balanced portfolio is achieved by buying investments outside Slough.
- (b) That the scoring criteria associated with out-of-borough investment assets be amended as set out in the report.
- (c) That the Capital Programme for 2016/17 be amended to increase the existing budget by an additional £25m.

70. Lease Slough Refugee Support, 28 Bath Road, Salt Hill Park

A report was considered that requested the Cabinet to recommend to full Council approval for the letting of 28 Bath Road, Salt Hill Park to Slough Refugee Support (SRS). It was noted that full Council approval was required in its capacity as Trustees of Salt Hill Park.

The property was located in the south eastern corner of the park on the junction with Bath Road and Stoke Poges Lane. SRS had been in vacant possession of the building for some time but the terms for a new lease agreed in 2008 were never formalised. Terms had now been agreed for the granting of a 5 year lease with an annual rent of £8,700 which would allow the charity to continue their work supporting the local refugee community. After due consideration, the Cabinet agreed to recommend approval of the lease agreement to full Council at its meeting on 29th November 2016.

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Recommended – That the Council enter into lease agreement with SRS for 28 Bath Road, Salt Hill Park.

71. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The Cabinet considered two references from the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel meeting on 3rd November 2016:

- Resident involvement – That the Panel recommend to Cabinet that a Consultative Commissioning Group be established to improve resident involvement and that the Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal lead the Group.
- Neighbourhood Services: Garages – That the Panel requests Cabinet to support the development and rolling out of community based parking schemes for parking areas on housing land.

The Commissioner for Housing & Urban Renewal commented that he had considered the matters referred and proposed that the Cabinet accept both recommendations. This was agreed.

Resolved –

Resident involvement

- (a) That a Consultative Commissioning Group be established to improve resident involvement and that the Commissioner for Housing and Urban Renewal lead the Group.

Neighbourhood Services - Garages

- (b) That Cabinet support the development and rolling out of community based parking schemes for parking areas on Housing land.

72. Notification of Forthcoming Decisions

Resolved – That the published Notification of Decisions for the period between November 2016 to January 2017 be endorsed.

73. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item in Part II of the agenda as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 the Schedule 12A the Local Government Act 1972.

Below is a summary of the matters resolved during Part II of the agenda.

74. CPO Approvals for Seven Empty Properties

Approval was given to use CPO powers to acquire seven empty properties in Slough to facilitate bringing them back into residential use or redeveloping the sites for residential purposes.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.47 pm)