

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 12th July, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Arvind Dhaliwal (Chair), R Sandhu (Vice-Chair), Minhas, D Parmar, S Parmar, Rana and Sharif

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ali, Munawar and Swindlehurst (part)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor R Bains and Sarfraz

PART I

8. Declarations of Interest

None received.

9. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 14th June 2018

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2018 be approved as a correct record.

10. Action Progress Report

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that at the June 2018 Committee meeting, it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group, examining the security of the ballot and the promotion of youth participation, be established. Nominations for Members to serve on the Task and Finish Group were still awaited and following discussion, it was agreed that Councillors Minhas, S Parmar, Sharif and R Sandhu be appointed.

Resolved –

- a) That details of the Action Progress Report be noted
- b) That Councillors Minhas, S Parmar, Sharif and R Sandhu be appointed to the Voting Task and finish Group.

11. Member Questions

None.

12. Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2023/24

The Director of Regeneration introduced the report and the proposed acquisition of a town centre site within the context of the Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2023/24. Members were reminded that Cabinet agreed, at its meeting held on 29th May 2018, to approve the acquisition of the freehold interest and recommended to full Council that the Capital Strategy be revised to reflect this. At an extraordinary meeting of Council held on 7th June 2018 it was agreed that the Capital Programme be increased to reflect the purchase of the new Council headquarters in the town centre.

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Local resident, Mr Iftikhar, had registered to speak and the Chairman invited him to address the Committee. Mr Iftikhar raised a number of concerns regarding the proposed acquisition, which included his view that the Council had breached the Nolan principles and acted below the standards expected of them in Public Life and that the proposed building acquisition was owned by a company with an offshore destination which meant that the company did not pay corporation tax. It was noted that no consultation had been carried out with the residents of the town and that the proposed purchase did not represent value for money.

Councillors Ali and Munawar addressed the Committee under Rule 30 and stated that the current premises had recently been refurbished which meant that they were now adequate for the Council's needs. Members had a responsibility towards the residents of the Borough to ensure tax payers funds were being appropriately used and the decision to purchase this particular site had been a rushed decision; with feasible alternatives being discounted. Furthermore, there would be little or no parking at the town centre site for staff parking. The Director of Regeneration reminded the Committee that nine different town centre sites had been appraised and detailed in the information that had been considered by Cabinet and all due diligence had been carried out. Although the former Thames Valley University site had been assessed as part of the appraisals option, it was considered that purpose built accommodation represented greater value for money. It was also highlighted that in March 2019, there would no longer be parking for staff at the Montem car park, when the site would be developed for housing.

Councillor Swindlehurst, prior to making submissions to the meeting, declared that in accordance with the Councillors of Code of Conduct, Paragraph 3.18 he would make representations and then withdraw from the meeting; given that Cabinet had recommended to Council to increase the Capital Strategy to allow the proposed acquisition to be made. The Committee were reminded that the Capital Strategy had been increased by £98m to allow for a number of strategic acquisitions to be made and that an independent valuation of the proposed purchase had verified that it was a sound investment. Relocating the Council's offices to the town centre would realise a number of benefits including providing an immediate positive impact on the Town Centre's daytime/evening economy by increasing footfall; releasing St Martins Place for conversion to a mix of social and affordable residential accommodation; delivering improved services to our customers via smarter, more flexible working and enhanced IT; and helping reduce traffic levels, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by procuring a more energy efficient headquarters building. It was anticipated that there would be limited parking at the town centre site but proposals would be put forward to incentivise council employees to consider non-car modes of travel to work and expanding the Council's Electric Vehicle fleet.

(Councillor Swindlehurst left the meeting at 7.13pm)

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In the ensuing discussion, Committee Members sought clarification regarding the timeline of when discussions began regarding relocating to the town centre. It was noted that talks initially took place in December 2017 and that the financial benefits that would be achieved could be discussed in Part 2 of the meeting. Councillor Sharif stated that no talks had taken place when he served as a Cabinet Member and that the whole process had been rushed through with extraordinary meetings of both Cabinet and Council being convened to consider the matter and that the focus should be as to what is the best for the residents of the town.

Concern was expressed relating to the levels of borrowing and that the Council was close to the maximum amount of debt that the Authority could legally owe. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that the Council's external Treasury Management Auditors had provided assurance that the Council could fund the extra borrowing. It was noted that funds would be sourced via short term borrowing as the interest rates were much lower than long term borrowing and more favourable than those available from the Public Works Loan Board.

Members requested further details as to what measures would be implemented to address issues regarding staff parking and managing a reduction in the number of commuting journeys. The Committee were informed that Cabinet in October 2018 was due to receive a report outlining recommendations for the adoption of Fleet Challenge Measures, including timescale and costs associated with these measures and their benefits. A staff travel survey had also recently been conducted and it was agreed that details of this would be circulated to the Committee.

Recommended to Cabinet – That Cabinet consider the provision of affordable housing within the context of the Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2023/24.

13. Housing Strategy - Private Sector and Council Homes

The Service Lead Neighbourhood Services introduced a report that provided an overview of Themes 2 (Private Sector) and 3 (Council Homes) of the Housing Strategy to identify areas for further review.

The report set out the actions the Council was taking and planned to take which included strengthening the Housing Regulation Team and a process to issue civil penalties of up to £30,000 on 'rogue' landlords. In terms of Council stock, investment of £100m in existing homes was planned over the next seven years, a new repairs and maintenance contractor was in place and an Options Appraisal was underway on the long term options for the management of Council housing. It was agreed that further details regarding the Options Appraisal would be circulated to the Committee.

Members discussed the measures the Council was taking against rogue landlords and increase enforcement in the private rented sector. The Committee supported a proactive approach being taken against rogue

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landlords and requested statistics for the number of civil penalties issued in over the past five years. The issues relating to the large number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) was discussed and Officers confirmed that preparatory work had taken place to introduce a borough wide licensing scheme for HMOs to seek to improve standards for residents. It was anticipated that a report seeking approval to introduce a licensing scheme would be considered by the Cabinet in September 2018.

Members asked a number of other questions including measures to tackle illegal sub-letting of Council homes and it was responded that the fraud team had secured a number of successful prosecutions.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted.

14. Performance and Projects Report - Quarter 4 2017/18

The Committee received a report that provided the latest performance information for the 2017-18 financial year which included the Corporate Balanced Scorecard and an update on the progress of thirty key Council projects.

The Corporate Balanced Scorecard had 18 performance indicators of which two were showing significantly under performance and were 'red' rated. These were the prevalence of children with 'excess weight' at the end of primary school and bus punctuality. Members noted the action plan the Council was leading on childhood obesity as it had been a longstanding concern to the Committee. It was also noted that the Health Scrutiny Panel would be scrutinising some of the Council's public health programmes to tackle obesity.

No indicators had deteriorated since the previous quarter and four indicators had shown significant performance improvement – take up of NHS health checks, number of dwellings in Slough, affordable homes delivered and business rates collected. Members welcomed the progress and in relation to the increase in the number of dwellings of 846 in 2017/18 Members requested further information with comparative information from neighbouring local authority areas.

Progress on the Gold Projects was noted and two, Grove Academy and Haybrook College, had an overall 'red' RAG status. A Members asked about the Haybrook College project and it was noted that the risk had been to the delivery timetable. Further progress had been made since the reporting period in questions and further details and clarification explaining the position would be circulated to Members.

Resolved – That the Council's current performance as measured by the indicators within the balanced scorecard and update on Gold projects and performances as detailed in the report, be noted.

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15. Revenue Financial Report - 2017/18 (Provisional Outturn)

A report was considered that provided the Committee with an update on the provisional financial outturn for the Council for the 2017-18 financial year.

The Council's General Fund revenue outturn for the year had been £104.152m, which was a £0.22m underspend against the planned budget. This position was a considerable improvement on the in year overspend of £0.65m at the end of the third quarter of the year as a result of a range of management actions across the Council. Savings of £6.4m had been planned at the start of the year and these had all either been achieved or replaced with alternative savings in the service area.

The revenue budget was supplemented by the Transformation Fund of £3.9m and Members asked a number of questions about its operation. It was noted that the Government had given local authorities new flexibilities in the use of capital receipts for specified revenue investment.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the financial outturn for 2017-18 was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the provisional outturn financial position of the Council for 2017/18 be noted;
- (b) That the budget virements approved by Cabinet as listed in paragraph 7 be noted;
- (c) That the write offs approved by Cabinet as in paragraph 8 be noted;
and
- (d) That approval to tender for the Council's insurance contract be noted.

16. Forward Work Programme 2018/19

The Scrutiny Officer introduced a report that set out the proposed work programme for the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year. The agenda for the next meeting to be held on 13 September 2018 was agreed, subject to the addition of a report on Contract Management to provide an overview of current practice and how the Council managed and monitored the delivery and performance of contracts.

Resolved – That the Forward Work Programme be updated with the amendment above.

17. Members' Attendance Record 2018/19

Resolved – That the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

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18. Date of Next Meeting - 13th September 2018

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 13th September 2018.

19. 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 considered during Part II of the agenda.

20. Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2023/24 - Appendix C

The Committee received and discussed the location of the proposed acquisition of a new Council headquarters in the town centre and the financial implications and risks to the Council.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.24 pm)