

Slough Borough Council

REPORT TO: Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Ward All

PART I

FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

SBC COVID-19 RECOVERY AND RENEWAL PLANNING

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To consider the role for Overview & Scrutiny in scrutinising SBC's Covid-19 recovery and renewal planning, in line with Cabinet's resolution on 18th May (**see 5.1.6**).

2. **Recommendation**

2.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Review the information included in section 5 and the appendices.
- b) Decide how best the Overview & Scrutiny Committee can work with Cabinet to support recovery and renewal planning.
- c) Assign specific issues to the Committee's work programme, and those of the other scrutiny panels (**see 5.3**).

2. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy 2020-24**

Coronavirus has the potential to impact on the delivery of all of the Wellbeing Board's priorities:

1. Starting Well
2. Integration
3. Strong, Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods (Building Community Asset Resilience)
4. Workplace Health

However the response to the crisis has demonstrated the strength of community and partnership working.

3. **Five Year Plan 2020-24 Outcomes**

Coronavirus has the potential to impact on the delivery of all of the Five Year Plan's priority outcomes:

- Outcome 1 Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful
- Outcome 2 Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs
- Outcome 3 Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay
- Outcome 4 Our residents will live in good quality homes
- Outcome 5 Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents

4. **Other Implications**

- (a) **Financial** –There are no financial implications associated with the proposed actions.
- (b) **Risk Management** – There are no identified risks to the proposed actions. A Covid-19 risk register has been prepared (Appendix B).
- (c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications** - There are no Human Rights Act implications associated with the proposed actions.
- (d) **Equalities Impact Assessment** - There is no requirement to complete an Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to this report.

5. **Supporting information**

5.1 **SBC Covid-19 strategy**

- 5.1.1 The introduction of the 'lockdown' by the UK government saw non-essential businesses close down and the population (with the exception of Key Workers) instructed to work from home to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The looming economic crash created by the closure of most businesses requires Slough Borough Council to reconsider existing strategies and introduce revised short and medium-term plans to respond to the inevitable health, wellbeing, social and financial aftershocks of the public health crisis.
- 5.1.2 Whilst these short to medium-term plans will introduce financial and social pressure points on the Council, the intention is that Recovery will make SBC a more resilient and inclusive organisation.
- 5.1.3 On 18th May, Cabinet agreed to develop two separate but related plans: a two-year Recovery Plan and a five-year Renewal Plan.

- 5.1.4 The rationale is that by adopting this approach, SBC will be in a position to speed-up the Council's transition from Crisis Management/Business Continuity Planning to re-focusing on a place where people choose to live, work, shop, invest and do business and positioning Slough as the strategic partner of choice in SE England. If effective, the Recovery Plan will help to establish '*the new norm*' for Slough and incorporate new dynamics into the existing Our Futures (transformation) Programme.
- 5.1.5 The attached slides (Appendix A) provide a high level analysis of the impacts of Covid-19, which will be addressed in the plans for recovery and renewal. These include accelerating much of our initial thinking that has informed the Our Futures transformation programme including:
- The importance of partnership and community working
 - The value of shared intelligence and data across the council and with partners to build a common picture of our communities so that we can use the insight to identify shared priorities
 - The importance of addressing socio economic factors that contribute to the health and wellbeing of our communities
- 5.1.6 The Cabinet also resolved to 'establish a joint Working Group of Cabinet and Scrutiny to work together to contribute to the work'.

5.2 Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance on scrutiny during the COVID crisis

- 5.2.1 In April, the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) published guidance for councillors on managing some of the challenges associated with carrying out their governance roles during the Covid- 19 crisis. Although not an official agency, the CfPS are recognised for their expertise in this area, and have been working closely with Government and the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 5.2.2 The guidance lays out a set of key challenges against which scrutiny must now operate, which may need to change the way in which scrutiny discharges its responsibilities in the short to medium term, including that:
- Members' capacity will be mainly focussed on supporting residents
 - Officer capacity will be reduced and scrutiny staff may have been redeployed
 - The situation is too fast-moving to allow for the effective prioritisation of scrutiny work far in advance
- 5.2.3 Despite these challenges, scrutiny must restart to provide councillors and the public with assurance that decisions are being made in a way that is transparent and accountable. Councillors need to be kept in the loop and recognised as having a valid and vital role to play. Accountability and oversight also needs to be more dynamic, and engage with the realities of the situation, while ensuring there is a clear paper trail for decisions.

5.2.4 The guidance also suggests a new substantive focus for scrutiny, in light of the crisis:

- **Oversight of the system response to COVID-19** - scrutiny can consider how well partners are working together, overseeing the systems that contribute to smooth, effective decision-making, and bringing influence to bear on disagreements or blockages.
- **Oversight on life and limb issues** - there will be particular services in the local area exposed to unique pressures as a result of the pandemic. Scrutiny can productively keep a watching brief on council and partner action on these matters, which include:
 - Use of social care powers
 - Protecting vulnerable children
 - The intersections around public health, community health and acute health where the pandemic will make particular demands
- **Acting as a conduit for community experiences** - councils will need ways of understanding how these trends are developing on the ground – and how voluntary activity may need to be supported differently. The public forum of scrutiny is a convenient and (potentially) high profile way to draw those insights into the council's corporate work.

5.2.5 The guidance also states that “scrutiny members will probably wish to maintain a watching brief over general council services and activity. Certain matters may engage with the COVID-19 response and other life and limb matters – in which case they can be escalated to committee. Other matters would probably need to go on hold.”

5.3 Constitution - Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Responsibilities

5.3.1 Under Article 6 of SBC's constitution, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee' scope incorporates all Overview and Scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council and the co-ordination of the Overview and Scrutiny work plan - including the allocation of issues to Scrutiny Panels.

5.3.2 It is therefore necessary for the Committee to consider which issues arising from SBC's Covid-19 recovery and renewal planning should be referred to which panel/committee.

6. Comments of other committees

6.1 This report has not been shared with any other committees.

7. Conclusion

7.1 SBC's Covid-19 recovery and renewal planning is an important strategic area, which warrant extensive and effective scrutiny.

7.2 The crisis also presents an opportunity for Overview & Scrutiny to work in a new way alongside the executive to improve planning and decision making, as well as helping to raise Overview & Scrutiny's profile in line with the LGA's recommendations.

8. **Appendices attached**

A - Recovery and Renewal planning (slides)

B – Covid-19 Risk Register

9. **Background papers**

1. Agenda and decisions, Cabinet, Monday, 18th May, 2020.
2. Centre for Public Scrutiny, COVID-19 support to councils, *Guide 2: Approaches to scrutiny during the crisis*, April 2020.
3. Slough Borough Council Constitution, May 2019, Article 6 - Overview and Scrutiny