

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 7th April, 2022.**

**Present:-** Councillors Gahir (Chair), Matloob (Vice-Chair), Basra (from 6.52pm), Dhaliwal, Kaur, S. Malik, Sharif and Smith

**Apologies for Absence:-** None.

### **PART I**

#### **36. Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

#### **37. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 8th March 2022**

**Resolved –** That the minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

#### **38. Member Questions**

No questions had been submitted.

#### **39. Initial ICT Improvement Programme**

The Director of Finance introduced a report on the Initial ICT Improvement Programme, which had been approved by Cabinet on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The Committee had previously requested an update on the work to stabilise and improve the Council's ICT and the report set out the plan to modernise the ICT infrastructure, manage the risks and improve ICT capabilities to enable the Council to realise future benefits in terms of cost savings and service delivery improvements.

The Council faced a number of long standing and more recent issues with its IT service which included old systems and infrastructure which were not robust, a dependence on interim staff and a digital function which required improvements. The Improvement Plan was summarised and included a costed programme of £4.6m investment to stabilise and improve the service.

*(Councillor Basra joined the meeting)*

The Committee discussed various aspects of the report and commented that the Council had made several previous attempts to improve ICT and asked what would be different this time. In response, it was noted that there was now a comprehensive and cost plan in place which would be delivered by a restructured ICT team with the resources they required and project management support. Members recognised the importance of making sure the infrastructure was invested in given the pace of technological advancement and need to update and renew infrastructure and software. ICT

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was fundamental to delivering good public services and improving ICT was therefore a key priority for the authority as a whole. In response to a question, assurance was provided that the funding allocated was considered sufficient to deliver the programme.

Members asked how progress would be tracked and monitored and it was noted that detailed tracking systems were in place. Workforce was a key issue and recruitment was challenging in the IT sector. The ICT restructure would therefore seek address these issues and ensure the roles available in Slough were competitive and offered career development.

The Committee discussed the balance between in-house capacity and external provision. Councillor Sharif proposed and Councillor Kaur seconded the following recommendation to Cabinet which was agreed by the Committee.

*“That the Committee support the proposed hybrid approach of building both in-house capacity and securing an ICT partner be supported in principle, but that key data storage and management hardware and systems be kept in-house.”*

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee expressed support for the plan and requested an update in the third quarter of 2022/23.

### **Resolved –**

(a) That the report be noted the Cabinet decisions which were to:

- note the initial assessment of the issues with the service set out in the report
- note that these will be continuously worked on from now going forward
- approve the expenditure set out in Appendix 2 and contained within the Council’s recently approved budgets
- note the work being undertaken by the digital team and the projects outlined in appendices 3 and 4 and that a delivery update will be brought back when the work has been fully assessed
- note that the Director of Finance will be approving the licences and contracts set out in appendix 5 and taking forward actions to avoid this reoccurring for these contracts in the future
- note that work continues to identify any other such matters
- note the outcome of the DLUHC cyber security assessment and the work being undertaken, appendices 6 and 7
- delegate authority to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Leader, to appoint ICT officers on an interim basis and to commence procurement for an ICT partner (s)
- agree that a report is presented to Cabinet with an updated plan for future phases in quarter 3 2022/23

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(b) That the following recommendation be made to Cabinet:

*“That the Committee support the proposed hybrid approach of building both in-house capacity and securing an ICT partner be supported in principle, but that key data storage and management hardware and systems be kept in-house.”*

(c) That a further update be provided to the Committee in Quarter 3 of the 2022/23 financial year.

### 40. Exclusion of the Press and Public

**Resolved** – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items in Part II of the agenda as they 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.

### 41. Initial ICT Improvement Programme - Appendices 6 and 7

**Resolved** – That Appendices 6 and 7 on Cyber Security & Resilience Activities and the DLUHC Cyber Treatment Plan be noted.

The meeting then returned to Part I and the press and public were re-admitted.

### 42. Nova House/GRE5 Update

The Committee received an update on the current position of Ground Rent Estates 5 Limited (GRE5) and the progress of works at Nova House. Members noted the background to the Council's acquisition of Nova House to expediate fire remediation works following the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017.

It was noted that the project had experienced delays due to Covid restrictions and the requirements to undertake additional tests and surveys which identified a range of defects and technical issues. These tests revealed further significant structural defects dating from the conversion of the building in 2014/15. By the end of January 2022 all ACM cladding had been removed from the building and a fire-resistant weatherproof membrane had been installed whilst solutions to the structural issues were remediated. The key structural defects were summarised. Due to the ongoing severity of the issues identified a 'Waking Watch' remained at the building and the timing of the removal of this was currently under review with the Fire Service and GRE5's fire safety consultant.

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Members asked a number of questions about progress which are summarised as follows:

- The reasons the original defects were not identified by the private Building Control provider. A significant amount of work to investigate the building control issues had been carried out which highlighted that there were defects that were non-compliant. After investigating the matter and taking legal advice, the Council had not taken out action against the Building Control provider and the reasons for this were explained. The planning issues were also raised. Members were assured there were no other actions or powers the planners could have utilised in respect of Nova House.
- The Committee noted that the Council and GRE5 had successfully agreed grant funding of £9.3m from Homes England for eligible development costs. Progress had been made on the insurance claim and it was confirmed that the policy did cover the cladding itself. Further work was needed before a figure could be put on the potential insurance claim. Members of the Committee expressed concern for the position leaseholders found themselves in given the potential for the recovery of costs to meet any shortfall from the insurance claim. Central government had recently suggested that the costs to leaseholders may be capped but this was not confirmed.
- In response to a question it was confirmed that the total costs were approximately £19.6m, although this figure remained under review. Approximately £10m of costs had been incurred to date with the remainder due in 2022/23. Members asked if cost could rise further and it was noted that this was a risk which the Council was seeking to manage through discussions with Homes England.
- The Committee queried if all defects had now been identified and were informed that it was not possible to confirm that for certain. This was an identified risk that was being managed.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee noted the update.

**Resolved –** That the update report be noted

### 43. Draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22

The Committee considered the draft Annual Scrutiny Report for 2021/22 which summarised the work undertaken by scrutiny during the municipal year. Members were also invited to discuss lessons learned and areas of improvement for scrutiny in the next year.

The Committee endorsed the draft Annual Report without amendment.

In relations to lessons learned, Members commented as follows:

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- Improvements were required in report writing, particularly the use of plain English and clear language to make them more accessible for Members and the public.
- More working group or task and finish groups should be established to do more scrutiny work outside of formal meetings, subject to the resources available to support additional meetings.
- A glossary of key terms was suggested and it was noted this would be included in the new Members' Handbook in May 2022.
- More pre-meetings were requested as these had been held only for certain meetings in the previous year. It was agreed more time to prepare for formal meetings would make them more effective.
- It was agreed that early and detailed budget scrutiny this year had been a welcome and important improvement.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Members thanked the Chair for way he had led the Committee in the past year and the Chair thanked Members for their contributions.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the draft Annual Report be endorsed and presented to Council.
- (b) That the lessons learned be incorporated into the scrutiny improvement plan in 2022/23.

## **44. Annual Petitions Report 2021/22**

The Committee received the annual petitions report for the period between April 2021 and March 2022. It was noted that 12 petitions had been received during the year, which was lower than previous years. Democratic Services would monitor the number of petitions to seek to ensure the petitions process was as simple and accessible as possible to encourage participation in the democratic process.

**Resolved –** That the Annual Petitions Report be noted.

## **45. Members' Attendance Record**

**Resolved –** That the Members' Attendance Record for 2021/22 be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.39 pm)