

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 20th March, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Mann (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Anderson, Bains, Hulme, Nazir and Pantelic

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Akram

PART 1

146. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

147. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th February 2023 and 7th March 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 27th February and 7th March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

148. Slough Borough Council's Implementation of the Recruitment Direction

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the steps taken by the Council since 1st September 2022 when Commissioners were given new reserve powers to appoint to the top three tiers of SBC management.

It was acknowledged that the Council's initial response to the direction was not sufficient in quality or pace and the steps undertaken to address this were detailed. The Chief Executive and Executive Director posts were all now fully recruited to with permanent appointments made in line with the procedure rules set out in the Constitution. Commissioners had been directly involved in the recruitment processes for these posts. Other actions taken included ensuring Commissioners were appropriately involved in future recruitments by strengthening the recruitment control process for posts covered by the direction and work to make improvements to the HR function and practice across the organisation.

The Cabinet welcomed the recent progress that had been made and confirmed its commitment to demonstrating the Council was effectively responding to the recruitment direction. The report would also be considered by the Employment & Appeals Committee to ensure wider Member oversight of process. At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Noting the fact that two of the Commissioners, Max Caller and Margaret Lee had recently left their roles with SBC, the Leader placed on record his thanks for the contribution they had made to the Council's recovery and improvement since December 2021 and stated that Members looked forward to working with any new commissioners appointed in the future.

Resolved – That the contents of the report be noted.

149. ICT & Digital Strategy 2023-2026

The Lead Member for Customers Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that set out the proposed new strategy for all ICT & Digital services at Slough Borough Council for the period 2023 to 2026.

An “adaptive strategy” was proposed that provided sufficient flexibility to respond to the Council’s changing needs, operations and technological advances over the coming years. The strategy had clear outcomes and would support the delivery of the corporate plan and respond to the direction relating to IT. The report set out the three core themes which were technological infrastructure and support service improvements; a refreshed approach to digital channels for residents; and a new structured approach to the platforms that would bring together data from across the authority and partners to inform decision making.

The Cabinet discussed a range of issues including the progress on resolving the connectivity issues at Observatory House, the move to a new telephony system and particularly the importance of moving from strategy to implementation to ensure the key outcomes were achieved and ICT was in a position to support the Council’s recovery. It was asked whether the leadership and resources were in place to delivery the strategy. The Lead Member highlighted a high quality leadership team was now in place on a permanent basis, notably the AD Chief Digital & Information Officer, and the team was confident the strategy could be successfully implemented. The next phase of improvements included a laptop refresh and working with each individual service to assess their specific requirements and put in place the necessary provision.

The Cabinet highlighted the importance of improving the use of data in informing decision making at all levels of the Council. The Chief Digital & Information Officer responded that a Data Strategy Group had been established and was leading this work. The progress and next steps for the housing system was cited as an example of the joint work between ICT and services.

After due consideration, the strategy was approved.

Resolved – That the refreshed strategy for ICT & Digital services as detailed in the report and the full strategy document as attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

150. Contract Award for Voluntary and Community Sector Contracts

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report that sought approval to award contracts to two providers for the delivery of voluntary and community sector services and information and advice services following a procurement by open tender.

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Contracts would commence in July 2023 and would be for three years plus two optional extensions of one year each, subject to satisfactory performance. The contracts would be funded through the Better Care Fund and Public Health Grant.

The Part II appendices that included details of the successful bidders and pricing schedules were noted during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information. The contracts for the two remodelled services would be more fully aligned to the strategic aims of the Council and its partners, significantly reduce demand for adult social care and deliver best value.

Lead Members asked how the outcomes would be monitored and to which body of the Council would receive updates. The services would be monitored through a formal contract management approach on a quarterly basis and reports would be made annually to Cabinet regarding performance. The new Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee would be able to consider any formal scrutiny arrangements of this or any other contract when it put together its work programme for 2023/24.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed to the award of a contract to Supplier A for the delivery of Lot 1: Voluntary and Community Sector services for the period of 5 years (three- year contract plus two optional extensions of one year each subject to satisfactory performance) from 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2028. This would be at a total contract value of £2,041,255.
- (b) Agreed to the award of a contract to Supplier B for the delivery of Lot 2: Information and Advice Services for the period of 5 years (three- year contract plus two optional extensions of one year each subject to satisfactory performance) from 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2028. This would be at a total contract value of £600,000.
- (c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Public Health and Social Care to complete the final negotiations and enter into contracts with Supplier A and Supplier B.

151. Simplified Planning Zone - Slough Trading Estate

The Lead Member for Housing & Planning introduced a report on the background to the Simplified Planning Zone (SPZ) for the Slough Trading Estate and sought authorization to notify the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that the Council intended to work with SEGRO on a new SPZ.

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SPZs were defined areas that granted planning permission for a range of pre-agreed uses for a period of ten years. The Lead Member highlighted that notifying the Secretary of State did not bind the Council to enter into an SPZ and this was the start of the process. The current SPZ expired at the end of 2024 and starting the process now would provide sufficient time to engage with SEGRO on the conditions applied to the SPZ in terms of the scale and uses permitted within the SPZ and the Section 106 that would accompany it to mitigate the impacts of the developments that would take place over the decade. The SPZ area was likely to slightly increase as outlined in the maps in the appendix.

The Cabinet agreed to work with SEGRO and to notify the Secretary of State. Lead Members discussed some of the likely planning issues that would arise during the discussions including the growth sectors that would shape future uses and the contours of the trading estate particular where it met residential areas. In relation to the package of mitigations issues such as skills and sustainable transport would be areas for discussion.

Resolved – That it be agreed that the Council work with SEGRO to develop a new SPZ and to notify the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of the Council's intention to do so.

152. Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals from its meeting on 16th March 2023 relating to Nova House/Ground Rent Estates 5 Limited (GRE5).

The report included the GRE5 business plan for the five years to March 2028 and an update on the refurbishment works at Nova House to address the fire safety defects identified. The Executive Director Property & Housing summarised the current position and stated that works had been paused until the funding issues had been resolved. The refurbishment had taken longer and cost more than the Council had originally envisaged due to the scale of defects identified. The Council was being asked to increase the loan facility by £5m to enable works to continue. The current total cost estimate for the works and all other costs was £28.4m. It was noted that Homes England had provided funding and had indicated it would put more in if the Council's contribution was agreed. The status of the insurance claim was noted and was set out fully in the exempt appendices which were considered without disclosing any of the confidential information. The loan would be required to be repaid to the Council from any settlement on the legal claim. Assurance was provided that all legal and other options to minimise the financial exposure to the Council were being pursued.

The Cabinet was given a verbal update of the detailed discussion that had taken place at the Cabinet Committee meeting. Lead Members reiterated the concerns they had previously expressed about the original acquisition and the condition of the building. However, it was recognised that in the existing circumstances it was important to finish the works and the only viable option

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to fund the remainder of the refurbishment included increasing the loan from the Council as well as pursuing the other funding options set out in the report and appendix. Lead Members asked about the engagement that was taking place with the residents to make sure they were well informed about the situation and it was noted the GRE5 directors were conducting regular liaison with them.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations from the Cabinet Committee were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Business Plan for GRE5, as at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
- (b) Approved an increase in the loan facility by £5m to allow the work programme to continue in advance of any recovery via the legal proceedings, future grant from Homes England or leaseholder recovery.
- (c) Agreed to regular, at least quarterly, reports being presented to the Cabinet Committee updating on progress and risks and for a future report recommending approval of an updated shareholder agreement.

153. References from Overview & Scrutiny

There were no references from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or scrutiny panels.

154. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I without disclosing any of the information in the exempt appendices. It was therefore not necessary to exclude the press and public who were in attendance for the duration of the meeting.

155. Contract Award for Voluntary and Community Sector Contracts - Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

156. Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals - GRE5 (Nova House) Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.31 pm and closed at 7.37 pm)