

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 18th September, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Smith (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), I. Ahmed, Bedi, Kelly, Muvvala and Wright

Also present:- Councillors Hulme, Iftakhar, Matloob, Satti and Shaik

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART 1

23. Declarations of Interest

Agenda item 15 (Minute 37 refers) - Asset Disposal Programme Update: Councillor Ahmed declared that he would not participate or vote on this agenda item due to his role as a Parish Councillor on Wexham Court Parish Council.

24. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th July 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

25. Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn 2022/23

The Cabinet considered a report that set out the draft revenue and capital outturn position for the Council for the financial year 2022/23.

The Lead Member for financial oversight summarised the key aspects of the report. It was noted that 2022/23 had been a challenging year for the Council due to the actions, savings and transformation needed following the issuing of a Section 114 Notice in July 2021, and the wider national issues that had impacted on local government such as the rise in inflation and rising demand for services. The budget for 2022/23 required a Capitalisation Direction on £84.1m in order to balance. The draft outturn position indicated that the Capitalisation Direction actually required was £59.2m, a reduction of £24.9m.

The total savings target for the Council in 2022/23, excluding Slough Children First, had been £17.3m of which £13.5m had been achieved.

After due consideration the Cabinet noted the draft outturn position and agreed the recommended carry forward requests and amendments to the capital programme as proposed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the carry forwards requested by departments as set in paragraphs 8.1 to 8.5 and Table 7 of the report be approved.

- (b) That the proposed additions and amendments to the Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 8.6 and Table 8 of the report be approved.

26. Refresh of the Councils Finance Improvement Action Plan

The Lead Member for finance introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the improvement activity within the Finance & Commercial Services directorate.

The refreshed improvement action plan was the first from the new permanent Executive Director of Finance & Commercial and the streamlined approach sought to consolidate the various action plans and updates previously presented to Members including progress against the Directions, CIPFA recommendations and short term actions to stabilise the Council's financial position following the issuing of the Section 114 Notice. Continued improvement of the financial management of the Council was a key priority across the Council. The Executive Director commented that the finance improvement action plan was not just about an exit strategy from Government intervention, but about setting a direction and vision for the way in which the financial framework and function worked in Slough. The report detailed the good progress that had been made in many areas, but it was recognised the improvements needed to be built upon and sustained.

The Leader of the Council commented on the importance of continuing the financial improvement journey as the Council must deliver best value for money. Lead Members asked a number of questions including about the current position regarding the audits of the Council's accounts since 2018/19. The Executive Director confirmed that the indicative timetable was for all audits to be up to date by December 2024. However, there was a significant national backlog in the audit of local government financial statements, primarily due to a shortage in audit capacity and national guidance was awaited which would impact on the timetable for Slough. The Audit & Corporate Governance Committee would continue to be kept informed of the position by officers and the external auditors.

The Cabinet thanked the Executive Director and the finance team for the significant progress that had been made and confirmed its support for the refreshed finance improvement action plan.

Resolved – That the proposed finance vision and the subsequent action plan for finance and commercial services be noted.

27. Approval of annual Business and Improvement Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

The Lead Member for children's services introduced a report that sought approval of the Slough Children First (SCF) Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026. Approval was also sought for retrospective in-year change requests for the previous two financial years to fund historic deficits.

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The Cabinet recognised the importance of the company having a high quality, long-term Business and Improvement Plan that set out its strategic priorities and financial strategy. The plan set out at Appendix A to the report brought together the improvement plan and financial plan for the company into a single document to seek to ensure alignment between delivering the services that children in Slough required with the available resources. The challenges facing children's services in Slough and nationally were summarised. The Executive Director, People (Children) / SCF Chief Executive outlined the key elements of the plan and the progress that had been made on delivering the necessary improvements to children's services. Lead Members also considered the recommendations in relation to funding the historic deficits of the company and noted the financial risks to the Council, which were mitigated in part by a high quality business plan.

The recommendations were approved and the Cabinet noted the schedule of future reports on various aspects of the governance of SCF to ensure performance was monitored and timely decisions taken in respect of future contract sums and business and improvement plans.

Resolved –

- (a) That the SCF's Business and Improvement Plan for 2023 to 2026 at Appendix A to the report be approved.
- (b) That the requests for funding of deficits from 2021/22 and 2022/23 at a total of £5.312m from the budget equalisation reserve be approved.
- (c) That the increase in the contract sum for 2023/24 of £4.447m, taking the total contract sum to £40.514m using in-year contingency budgets be approved.
- (d) That the plan for future cabinet reports be noted as follows:
 - December 2023 – approve the 2024-2027 Business and Improvement Plan with details of the requested contract sum for 2024/25 and the updated contractual key performance indicators and formally note the SCF Annual Report for 2022/23.
 - February 2024 – contract sum to be formally approved as part of the Council's budget setting process.
 - June / July 2024 – note the Annual Report for 2023/24 and an update on progress against the approved Business and Improvement Plan.

28. Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1 2023/24

The Lead Member for finance introduced a report that set out the forecast position of the Council for the financial year 2023/24 as at the end of the first quarter to the end of June 2023.

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The Lead Member commented that whilst the administration had not set the current budget, it was committed to owning it and delivering financial sustainability. It was noted that service revenue budgets were forecast to overspend by £24.4m in 2023/24, although centrally held contingencies, once allocated, would mitigate this in part, and reduce the forecast overspend to £8.4m. Corporate underspends in respect of interest costs and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) amounted to £3.1m and further reduced the overall forecast to an overspend of £5.3m, if no action was taken. It was proposed and agreed that all Lead Members would work with their Executive Directors to reduce the forecast overspend and that progress would be detailed in future quarterly reports to Cabinet.

The Cabinet considered and approved the virement requests and agreed to authorise a delegation to the Executive Director of Finance & Commercial, following consultation with the Lead Member, to allocate the pay inflation of £2.8m held centrally to departments once the pay award was known.

Resolved –

It was agreed:

- (a) That Lead Members work with individual Executive Directors to reduce the forecast overspend ahead of the Quarter 2 monitoring report for Cabinet.
- (b) To authorise a virement from centrally held budgets to Adult Social Care allowing expenditure against the 2 ring fenced grants, of £1.2m and £0.6m, that have been awarded this year.
- (c) To authorise a virement from centrally held budgets to service directorates in respect of inflationary pressures, amounting to £3.3m of the £5.3m available, and allow the balance of £1.9m to be added to the General Contingency.
- (d) To authorise a virement from centrally held budgets to service directorates in respect of pressures, other than inflation, amounting to £1.6m of the £12.4m available
- (e) To authorise the funding of the one-off payment of £5.312m to Slough Children First in respect of prior year deficits from the Budget Equalisation Reserve, subject to the Slough Childrens First Business Plan (elsewhere on the agenda) being agreed.
- (f) To delegate the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Finance Commissioner, to allocate the pay inflation of £2.8m held centrally to departments once the pay award is known.

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It was noted that:

- (g) Service revenue budgets were forecast to overspend by £24.4m in 2023/24; centrally held contingencies once allocated would mitigate this in part, and reduce the forecast overspend to £8.4m. Corporate underspends in respect of interest costs and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) amounted to £3.1m and reduced the overall forecast to an overspend of £5.3m.
- (h) Medium Term Financial Strategy Savings (MTFS) of £19.7m were expected to be delivered against planned savings of £22.4m.
- (i) That the Capital programme was forecast to underspend by £17.2m.

29. Updated Corporate Plan

The Leader of the Council introduced a report on the updated Corporate Plan which the Cabinet was asked to recommend for approval to full Council on 28th September 2023.

The plan detailed the proposals for the Council's core purpose, its approach and updated strategic priorities, which developed those set out in the current plan *Doing right by Slough*. The 6-week consultation on the draft plan had concluded on 7th August with the majority of respondents supporting the proposed purpose, approach and priorities.

The strategic priorities of *Doing right by Slough* had been retained, though updated to reflect the evidence, data and new Council purpose which included *Closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children*. This reflected the fact that Slough had poor healthy life expectancy compared to neighbouring areas and one of the youngest populations in the country.

The Leader highlighted the importance of rebuilding residents trust in the Council, understanding their needs and mobilising the available resources behind the agreed priorities. It would be important to monitor and report on progress against the plan and it was noted that there would be a performance report presented to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, starting in October 2023. A progress report against the Corporate Plan would be reported to full Council on an annual basis.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed to recommend the updated Corporate Plan to Council for approval.

Recommended – That the Corporate Plan as at Appendix A to the report be approved.

30. Slough Adult Carers Strategy 2023-26

The Lead Member for adult social care introduced a report that sought approval of the Slough Adult Carers Strategy 2023-26.

The strategy set out how the Council, working with partners, would support and encourage carers to manage their own health and wellbeing and ensure the right support was known about and available at the right time. The aim was to ensure that Slough was a place where carers could balance their caring roles with achieving a desired quality of life and minimise the negative impacts of caring on a persons health and wellbeing. The Associate Director, People Strategy and Commissioning summarised the key aspects of the strategy which was set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

The Leader of the Council and several Lead Members commented on the vital role that carers played in the town, recognised them for the care they provided and commended the work done to produce a strategy that sought to support them. The Cabinet noted the consultation feedback and equalities impact assessment before approving the strategy.

Resolved – That the Slough Adult Carers Strategy 2023-26 set out at Appendix 2 be approved.

31. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Update

The Lead Member for children’s services introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on the progress of improvements to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services following the inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in Autumn 2021.

Lead Members noted the background including the approval by Cabinet in February 2022 of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA). Officials from the Department for Education (DfE) had visited the Council in February 2023 and concluded that there had been a failure to make sufficient progress against any of the areas of significant weakness identified in the WSoA. The DfE had therefore issued the Council with a Statutory Direction on 4th August 2023. In response, a new SEND Improvement Plan had been developed which incorporated the actions in the WSoA.

The Cabinet supported the plan and the budget monitoring actions. Further update reports would be provided to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

Resolved –

- (a) That the statutory direction made by the Secretary of State for Education set out at Appendix 3 be noted.
- (b) That the progress made to date, including the position as at July 2023 contained in Appendix 2 be noted.
- (c) That the draft SEND Improvement Action Plan at Appendix 1 be noted.
- (d) That a report setting out the full financial implications of the proposed actions be received at the November cabinet meeting.

(e) To receive SEND update reports on a quarterly basis.

32. Update on Re-commissioning of Berkshire East Specialist Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Service

Further to the report to Cabinet in April 2023, Lead Members considered an update report on the re-procurement of the Berkshire East Specialist Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Service. These services aimed to reduce harm caused by sexually transmitted infections and HIV and provided access to contraceptive advice and services.

It was noted that due to a number of commercial and market issues identified during the market engagement activity since April 2023, the joint commissioning authorities recommended entering into a short term contract of two years to enable the development of a longer term procurement strategy for a redesigned service. The reasons were summarised and set out fully in the exempt appendices which were noted. The proposal would continue the existing joint commissioning arrangements across East Berkshire for two years from July 2024.

After due consideration the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That a maximum of a two-year contract award from 1 July 2024 to an eligible provider of Specialist Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) service provision as an interim continuation of joint commissioning arrangements across Berkshire East be approved.
- (b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director People - Adults in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial and the Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health, to sign all related legal and contractual documentation to enter into the interim contractual arrangement referred to at (a) above.
- (c) Agreed that Slough Borough Council in consultation with Bracknell Forest Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, commence procurement for future sexual and reproductive health services that better meet the future needs of local communities.

33. Update on the procurement forward plan for services in excess of £180,000 and works in excess of £1 million

The Cabinet considered a report on the procurement forward plan for services in excess of £180,000 and works in excess of £1 million.

The report updated Lead Members on further contracts that had been identified since the Cabinet report of April 2023; and updated on contracts reported to April Cabinet where there had been significant changes such as

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revised procurement start dates or contract values. Lead Members were asked to authorise the commencement of procurement for the contracts set out in Appendix A to the report and, due to the timescales involved, to give delegated authority to relevant officers to award contracts for Mobile Telephony and Cloud Hosting of IT Systems Contracts and the Education Management System.

After due consideration the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the commencement of procurement for the list of goods, works or services set out in Appendix A to the report be authorised;
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Strategy and Improvement following consultation with the Lead Member for Public Protection, Customer Service, IT and Young Futures to the award contract, to the best value bidder, for the Mobile Telephony and Cloud Hosting of IT Systems Contracts as indicated in Appendix A, as requiring delegated authority to award contracts due to tight timescales involved.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of People (Children) following consultation with the Lead Member for Education, Children's Services, Lifelong Skills and Governance to direct award the contract for the Education Management System as indicated in Appendix A, as requiring delegated authority to award contracts due to tight timescales involved.

34. Housing Service & Improvement Plan Proposals

The Lead Member for housing introduced a report that set out the core service risks and challenges that currently existed in the housing service, including housing management, repairs and accommodation provision. The report also identified high level improvement plan proposals to manage and improve services.

The Executive Director for Housing & Property explained that the housing service continued to manage significant challenges in providing its core services to tenants and leaseholders, and accommodation services more widely in terms of homelessness and temporary accommodation. If not addressed, the issues could lead to potential breaches of statutory and regulatory requirements and further reductions in service standards.

Members of the Cabinet discussed some of the contributory factors to the issues over recent years and asked questions about issues such as funding and the future plans for garage sites. The Lead Member detailed some of the work and improvements that were currently underway and summarised the improvement plan attached as an appendix to the report. Progress would be closely monitored with the Lead Member being updated on a monthly basis and reports to Cabinet every six months.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the improvement plan proposals contained in appendix A be approved.
- (b) That work already undertaken to reduce operational risks and improve overall service quality and performance be noted.
- (c) To receive six monthly update reports relating to the improvement plan objectives.

35. Observatory House - Strategic Business Case

The Lead Member for assets introduced a report that set out the options for the future use of Observatory House to optimise benefits and value for money. The report had been considered and discussed by the Cabinet Committee at its meeting held on 14th September 2023. It proposed developing the business case to enable robust, evidence-based recommendations to be made in a future report to Cabinet.

The report was supported by appendices which contained exempt information. These were considered by the Cabinet during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

It was recognised that it was important to the Council's recovery that the future of Observatory House be clarified. The future decision on the Council's occupation of the building had implications for wider parts of the Council's improvement and recovery programme such as the Digital Strategy and Customer Access Strategy. Several members of the Cabinet commented on the lack of due diligence carried out at the time of the original acquisition of Observatory House and emphasised the importance of ensuring a thorough and rigorous assessment of all the options to ensure best value could be delivered from such an important Council asset.

The Cabinet agreed a strong business case was essential and agreed that this would be carried out with a report back to Cabinet in the Spring of 2024 or earlier if possible.

Resolved –

- (a) That the strategic outline business case attached at Appendix 2 be approved and agree to the preparation of a full business case including all six of the identified options.
- (b) That a report will be brought back to Cabinet in Spring 2024 to agree a further developed business case on the future use of Observatory House.

36. Estate Strategy Update

The Lead Member for assets introduced a report that set out the current position in the development of a Phase I Estate Strategy for the Council. He stated that it was best practice for local authorities to have an estate strategy to drive decision making on the management of the authority's property portfolio and it was a significant gap that the Council had not had such a strategy in the past.

The report had been reviewed by the Cabinet Committee at its meeting held on 14th September 2023 and approval was sought to approve the guiding principles to inform the proposed future Estate Strategy. These principles would provide a steer for the completion of the strategy and enable Members to provide early input.

The report was supported by an appendix on the Estate Strategy baseline review which contained exempt information. This was considered by the Cabinet during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The Cabinet welcomed the development of the strategy and Lead Members commented on the approach they were taking towards asset management to ensure it was properly aligned to the Council's recovery and future operating model. Several Lead Members commented that having good plans in place for asset management and disposals would enable the new administration to deliver its manifesto commitment not to sell the towns cemetery and crematorium.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed the recommendations and noted that a report would come back to Cabinet in December 2023.

Resolved –

- (a) That the guiding principles set out in the report and in the appendix, to inform the proposed future Estate Strategy be approved.
- (b) That a report will be brought back to Cabinet in December 2023 with a recommended strategy document.

(Having declared an interest at the start of the meeting Councillor Ahmed left the Cabinet table and sat in the public gallery to signify that he would not be participating in the Asset Disposal Programme Update item)

37. Asset Disposal Programme Update

A report was considered on the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals from its meeting held on 14th September 2023 in relation to the Asset Disposal Programme Update. The Cabinet was recommended to

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note the progress of the first phase of the asset disposal programme and approve a revised Asset Disposal Strategy as at Appendix 2 to the report.

The appendices contained exempt information and were considered by the Cabinet during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

It was recognised that successful delivery of the asset disposal programme was central to Council's recovery, stabilisation of its budget and meet the requirements of the Capitalisation Direction agreed with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. Excellent progress had been made in delivering Phase I of the strategy with sales of £196m completed in 2022/23. In 2023/24 a further £11m of sales had been completed to date with several other assets at various stages of the disposal process. The report set out an updated strategic context for future decisions to ensure that the approach taken with the second phase was appropriate and delivered best value. Future phases of the strategy would include the identification of assets from the Council's operational portfolio and this would require more detailed work to be undertaken, including making the links to the emerging Estate Strategy.

Councillor Matloob was invited to address the Cabinet and he asked why the sale of community and social assets had been progressed before the new strategy had been agreed. In his supplementary question he cited examples including the sale of Unit 26 Wexham Business Village which was currently leased to an organisation associated with the Blackbeard MMA Community Hub which was a local sports club and Thames Valley Positive Support which operated from a site on Bath Road. The Leader responded that Phase 1 had focused on the disposal of assets from the development and investment portfolio and phase two had not yet commenced so no disposals had progressed from assets within the operational portfolio. Specifically in relation to Unit 26 Wexham Business Village, the property was not classified as a community asset. The Executive Director of Housing & Property explained that it had been bought as an investment asset and it was a commercial unit. The freehold was due to be auctioned in the next week and the sale would deliver best value. The tenant could bid in the auction, or if another party purchased it their lease terms would not be effected and it would therefore not result in the displacement of the club. The Bath Road property was not being disposed of but the lease was being regularised.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet welcomed the positive progress report on the delivery of Phase I of the strategy and approved the new strategy as at appendix 2 to the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the positive progress that had been made in delivering the first phase of the Asset Disposal Programme as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be noted;

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- (b) That the new Asset Disposal Strategy as set out in Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

38. Slough Urban Renewal - Update

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee from its meeting held on 14th September 2023 in relation Slough Urban Renewal (SUR). The Cabinet was asked to approve the updated SUR Business Plan and to note the decisions of the Cabinet Committee regarding the Site Development Plan for Haymil and the progress of other sites.

The report was supported by several appendices which contained exempt information. These were considered by the Cabinet during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The background to the SUR joint venture partnership was noted. The approval of the business plan by Cabinet was an annual requirement. In view of the financial circumstances of the Council the 2023 plan continued the approach which included no further sites being developed by SUR and no additional capital commitments to be provided by the Council. The plan was to dispose of key sites opted to the SUR which would reduce the Council's future financial commitments, generate disposal receipts, reduce borrowing requirements and significantly reduce the Council's risk profile. The disposal of SUR opted sites aligned to the objectives of the wider Asset Disposal Strategy and the Corporate Plan. The updates on the disposals of the North West Quadrant and Montem Lane sites previously agreed by Cabinet were noted.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

Resolved –

- (a) That it be noted that the Cabinet Committee had agreed the Site Development Plan (SDP) for Haymill and the delegation of authority to the Executive Director of Property, Planning & Housing in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the section 151 officer to pursue a disposal strategy (including the negotiation and agreement of legal documents that give effect to the disposal) and to report back to Cabinet for approval of the Adopted SDP and the final agreed disposal terms, subject to the demonstration of best value consideration for the disposal.
- (b) That the progress and status of key sites including the North West Quadrant (NWQ) site, Montem Lane, Stoke Wharf and Wexham be noted.
- (c) That the 2023 updated SUR business plan (covering the five-year period 2023 – 2028) be agreed.

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39. References from Scrutiny

There were no references from the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee.

40. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I and it was therefore not necessary to exclude the press and public.

41. Approval of annual Business and Improvement Plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF) - Appendix

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

42. Update on Re-commissioning of Berkshire East Specialist Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health Service - Appendix

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

43. Observatory House - Strategic Business Case - Appendices 1 and 2

Resolved – That the Part II Appendices 1 and 2 be noted.

44. Estate Strategy Update

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

45. Asset Disposal Programme Update - Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II Appendices be noted.

46. Slough Urban Renewal - Update - Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II Appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm)