

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 16th March, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Carter, Mann, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Smith and Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Akram, Anderson and Bains

PART 1

109. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

110. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd February 2020 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 20th February 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 3rd February 2020 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 20th February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

111. Coronavirus Update

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Council's planning had been ongoing since February and as the situation was escalating the Gold command structure had been established to enable the necessary decisions to be taken quickly within a robust governance structure. A number of Task Groups were in place and there was also strong engagement with the NHS and other partners, as well as regular communication with staff.

The Council was taking a responsible and proportionate response and was planning for a worst case scenario. Critical services had been agreed and work was taking place to identify high risk clients. The impact on services would be extensive and the authority was following Government's guidance.

Lead Members would be updated regularly as the situation evolved.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

112. Performance & Projects Report, Quarter 3 2019/20

The Service Lead Strategy & Performance introduced a report that set out the latest performance information for the third quarter of the financial year to the end of December 2019. The report included the corporate balanced scorecard, update on key projects and delivery against manifesto commitments.

Key areas of performance improvement included a reduction in the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and other children at Key Stage 4; the level of street cleanliness; and the number of licensed mandatory Houses of Multiple Occupation. However, whilst the number of adults managing their care and support via a direct payment had increased to 584 in quarter 3, it was below the 676 year to date target.

Nine projects in the portfolio had been completed during the quarter including Homelessness Reduction and the Crematorium Refurbishment. The transition of staff from Arvato had been successfully delivered on 1 November 2019 and the move to Observatory House had continued with minimal interruption to staff activities. The hotels and residential projects on the Old Library site were 9 ½ and 12 weeks ahead of schedule respectively. Significant progress had been made in delivery on the 43 manifesto pledges with a further 10 being completed in the third quarter and the majority on track to be delivered by the end of the year.

Lead Members asked about a range of specific issues including the start of enforcement action now that the HMO licensing scheme was progressing well and the work being done to increase the levels of activity of Slough residents. It was noted that the measure in the performance report on the level of inactivity was an annual measure and officers were seeking to identify other indicators that would help track progress.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That the Council's current performance as measured by the performance indicators within the balanced scorecard, the progress status of the gold projects and the manifesto commitments be noted.

113. Our Futures Update

The Director of Transformation introduced a report on the progress of the Our Futures, including updates from each of the workstreams under the Council's transformation programme.

The foundations of the programme had been laid in 2019 and major changes would be visible in 2020 including consolidating the estate footprint, adopting new ways of working and restructuring the organisation to be more flexible and joined up. The new operating model for the Council was summarised and significant progress had already been made in redesigning and reshaping the organisation to be more customer focused. The progress on the localities strategy, decant of Landmark Place, review of assets and move to 'cashless' operations were all highlighted.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Council was on schedule to move out of Landmark Place in May and the new community centre in Chalvey was due to be operational in August.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress of the Our Futures Programme, including updates from each workstream be noted.
- (b) That work to decant from Landmark Place and the development of the localities model be noted.

114. Assets Update

The Interim Director of Regeneration introduced a report that updated on the future use of St Martin's Place (SMP) and Observatory House. The update reflected the changes in circumstances from the assumptions made in the report to Cabinet on 29th May 2018 and impact on the business case.

The report proposed that the Council revert to the original proposal for SMP to be redeveloped via Slough Urban Renewal (SUR) into social and affordable housing. The next step was to carry out the necessary survey work on the building to refine the cost estimates of the conversion and approval was sought and given for a sum of £250,000 to undertake the preliminary design and survey work as part of an incremental approach. In response to a question it was expected that the surveys would be carried in the next three months.

The decision to convert SMP into housing would mean Slough Children's Services Trust would need to move to alternative premises. It was proposed that the Trust be offered the opportunity to move to the fourth floor of Observatory House. The Council would manage the move and cover all reasonable costs of relocation. This was agreed.

The Cabinet was updated on the business case for Observatory House, and noted the Appendix, which contained exempt information. The business case had changed since the acquisition in 2018, for example the transfer of Arvato staff had meant that only one floor would be available for commercial rent. Taking the changes into account, assurance was provided that the Council was still projecting to make operational savings within three years of purchase as set out in the original business plan.

The Cabinet welcomed the report and the highlighted that Observatory House was a high quality building providing an excellent working environment for staff and would contribute to the regeneration of the town centre. The update was noted and recommendations agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That it be noted that despite positive and negative variations in actual costs against the business case to move to 25 Windsor Road and the

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redevelopment of St Martin's Place into affordable housing, the Council is still projecting to make operational savings within three years of purchase as set out in the original business case.

- (b) That it be agreed to revert to the original proposal to remodel St Martin's Place to provide affordable housing.
- (c) That delegate authority be given to the Interim Director of Regeneration to enter into a Pre-Construction Services Agreement with Slough Urban Renewal and approve a budget of £250,000 for SUR to undertake a range of building surveys and preliminary design.
- (d) That SBC should offer the opportunity for the Slough Children's Services Trust to move (mainly) into the 4th floor of Observatory House, with SBC managing the move and covering all reasonable costs.
- (e) That the content of Confidential Appendix One be noted.

115. Equalities Update including Gender Pay Gap Report

The Lead Member for Health & Wellbeing introduced a report that set out the 2020 Equality & Diversity Report, including the 2019 gender pay gap figures and gender pay action plan.

The report showed that steady progress was being made by the Council in meeting its statutory equalities objectives. The 2019 gender pay gap figures showed that the mean pay gap had reduced from 4.7% in 2018 to 3.1%. The median pay gap remained in favour of women at -2.8%. The Cabinet noted the progress on the establishment of the Women's Network Group set up following the first gender pay gap action plan. The Council was, and would continue to seek to improve the collection of information to better understand equalities issues in the organisation and inform decisions.

The Cabinet discussed various aspects of the report including the progress being made to ensure balanced gender representation at higher levels of the organisation. It was also noted that whilst the Council's commitments under the Armed Forces Community Covenant were not included in this report, consideration would be given to how progress could be measured and reported.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the annual developments and progress with the council's current equality objectives be noted:
 - (i) To have a representative and inclusive workforce
 - (ii) To reduce inequalities in service access and outcomes

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- (iii) To improve equality of opportunity through fair and evidence-based decision-making
- (iv) To help foster good community relations and community cohesion

(b) That the independently calculated and verified results of the 2019 gender pay gap for Slough Borough Council employees and the associated action plan for 2020-21 be noted.

116. Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

The Lead Member for Housing & Community Safety introduced a report that sought approval of the revised Discretionary Housing Payments policy for 2020/21.

The grant awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions for 2020/21 for Slough Borough Council was £848,666 and it was proposed to maintain spending within this allocation to avoid placing additional pressures on the general fund. This grant was an increase of £198,162 on the current year as the Treasury had provided additional resources to support the most vulnerable people living in private rented accommodation. A total of 241 awards had been made in the year as at 20th February 2020 and it was anticipated that the full budget allocation would be utilised.

The Cabinet considered the policy set out in Appendix A to the report. The changes were to ensure the policy remained in line with legislation, reflected new case law and the increased grant. There was an expansion in the list of types of applications that should be prioritised as set out in paragraph 5.17 of the report.

After due consideration, the revised policy for 2020/21 was approved.

Resolved – That the policy for Discretionary Housing Payments as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved.

117. Local Welfare Provision Policy

The Lead Member for Housing & Community Safety introduced a report that sought approval for the revised Local Welfare Provision policy for 2020/21.

The Local Welfare Provision scheme provided one-off payments for residents facing extreme financial difficulties. This included food bank vouchers, utilities and essential furniture and white goods. The scheme had been originally funded by the Government, but it was a discretionary scheme now entirely funded by the Council. Many local authorities had reduced or withdrawn their schemes, however, SBC had retained the scheme to support vulnerable people.

The agreed budget for 2020/21 was £350,000 which was an increase of £50,000 on the 2019/20. The Council intended to maintain spend within this

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budget. Spend in 2019/20 was below profile and there was £77,000 available to be spent by the end of the year. The relatively minor changes to the policy for the next year were summarised and set out fully in the report.

The Cabinet discussed the ability of food banks in Slough to respond to the likely demand from residents during the coronavirus crisis. The Council was discussing with food banks the support they would need. The Government had established a separate hardship fund and although it was not clear how much Slough would receive it was agreed that this extra support should be aligned to LWP.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet approved the Local Welfare Provision policy for 2020/21.

Resolved – That the policy for Local Welfare Provision 2020/21 as set out in Appendix D of the report be approved.

118. Business Rates Discretionary Policies

The Director of Finance & Resources introduced a report that sought approval for the updated policies for Business Rates for 2020/21 onwards in respect of the retail discount and pub discount.

A supplementary agenda had been circulated following the Chancellor's Budget on 11th March 2020 announcing further support to businesses effected by the coronavirus restrictions. This included an increase in the retail discount from 50% to 100%. It was proposed that the Director of Finance & Resources be given delegated authority to update the policies to take account of any Government guidance. This was agreed.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations in the report and addendum were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the policies for Business Rates for 2020-21 at Appendix A and B be approved.
- (b) That the Director of Finance & Resources, following consultation with the Lead Member for Inclusive Growth & Skills, be given delegated authority to update the policies following receipt of detailed information or guidance arising from the changes announced by the Chancellor in the March 2020 Budget.

119. Reference from the Trustee Committee - Stabmonk Park Millennium Green Trust Transfer

The Service Lead Regeneration Development introduced a report that sought approval to the acceptance of the offer of the transfer of the Stabmonk Park Chalvey Millennium Green by the Chalvey Millennium Green Trust to Slough

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Borough Council. This matter had been considered and approved by the Trustee Committee and would, if agreed by Cabinet, be recommended to Council.

It was noted that the trustees of the Chalvey Green Millennium Trust had struggled to recruit younger residents into the trust and the burden of the management and maintenance of the green was starting to become disproportionate to the trusts resources. The Council had been in discussions with the Trust for some time around the improvements desired to Stabmonk Park as part of the Montem Leisure Centre redevelopment and the potential for the green to transfer to the local authority. The transfer process as detailed in the report was noted. The trust would be overseen by the Trustee Committee.

After due consideration, it was agreed to recommend the transfer to Council.

Recommended – To accept, in principle and subject to completion of due diligence and any requirements of the Charity Commission, the offer of the transfer of the Stabmonk Park Chalvey Millennium Green by the Chalvey Millennium Green Trust to Slough Borough Council, in it's capacity as a corporate trustee of charitable land.

120. References from Overview & Scrutiny

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

121. Notification of Forthcoming Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Decisions published on 14th February 2020 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by the Cabinet over the next three months.

Resolved – That the published Notification of Key Decisions for the period between March and May 2020 be endorsed.

122. Exclusion of 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.

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123. Part II Minutes - Extraordinary Cabinet, 20th February 2020

The Part II minutes of the Extraordinary Cabinet meeting held on 20th February 2020 were approved as a correct record.

124. Assets Update - Appendix

The Cabinet noted Appendix One – Business Case update in resolving the matters in the Part I report.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.33 pm and closed at 7.34 pm)