

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 28th January, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Sarfraz (Vice-Chair. Present until 8.00pm), Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, D Parmar, S Parmar and R Sandhu

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Kelly and Strutton

PART I

43. Declarations of Interest

In relation to the Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan (Minute 47 Refers), Councillor Gahir declared that he was a Hackney Carriage driver. He remaining in the meeting during scrutiny of the item.

44. Minutes of the Extraordinary Joint Meeting with the NCS Scrutiny Panel held on 29th October and of the Last Meeting held on 4th November 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the Extraordinary Joint Meeting with the NCS Scrutiny Panel held on 29th October 2020 and of the Last Meeting held on 4th November 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

45. Member Questions

No Member Questions had been received.

46. Our Futures Update

The Chief Executive, Director of Transformation and Associate Director, Place Regulation gave the Committee a comprehensive presentation on the Our Futures transformation programme of the Council.

The programme had begun 18 months ago and the vision for the Council was to be a world class organisation; strong local leader with partners; and to deliver high quality and effective outcomes. A new operating model had been developed and the principles were outlined. The key transformation areas included self-service and digitisation; locality based delivery; better customer service; and achieving savings through efficiency.

Progress to date included an improved Member casework process, plans for new locality hubs, roll out of Office 365, new website and the redesign of the senior leadership team. It was noted that Phase 1 of the staffing restructure had been completed and the consultation on Phase 2 for the rest of the staffing structure had recently finished. The 'new organisation' was due to be relaunched on 1st April 2021 and implementation and new ways of working for some elements would continue in the months that followed.

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The Committee asked a number of questions about the restructure including the financial savings and the likely scale of redundancies. The senior management restructure in Phase 1 would save £1m per annum with a further £3m expected from Phase 2, possibly rising to the stretch target of £4.2m. The number of redundancies was not yet known as the process wasn't complete and measures were in place to minimise redundancies by providing opportunities for staff 'at risk' to apply for other posts in the new structure. It was also noted that one of the objectives of the programme was to reduce the number of posts filled by agency staff and that the savings were also being achieved through improved ways of working. The Committee discussed the longer term impacts of the fact that 85% of staff were currently working from home as the Covid-19 pandemic had been a catalyst to implement agile working and new technology. Some staff would also be located in the hubs and alongside working from home there would be opportunities to review the office space required in the future and potentially generate income through renting out some space in Council assets. Staff engagement was raised and Officers recognised the restructure was a difficult and uncertain time for those most directly affected. A significant programme of engagement and support had been put in place. There had been 200 responses to the consultation which had resulted in a number of changes to the final structure.

Progress on the localities strategy was summarised including the current position and timeline for the various hubs proposed across the borough. Members noted the outline of new locality centre design which included a range of SBC services such as neighbourhood teams, housing, welfare & debt prevention and customer services. There was provision for partners depending on the local need as well as library and community space. Self-service terminals were available in all sites and Members emphasised the importance of support being available to people to access digital services. Questions were asked about the opening hours, varying provision between hubs and the location of the contact centre. In response it was noted that each hub would be different but the core services should ensure that residents wouldn't have to travel to hubs further away to access a service. However, residents were not restricted to their nearest hub as it may be that they would find it more convenient to visit another location. The opening hours were not yet fixed and it was noted many more services were now available 24/7 through digitisation and new ways of working. A Member asked about car parking provision at hubs and it was responded that there was considered to be adequate provision for expected use although the sites and model had been selected to encourage residents to be able to walk, cycle or be accessible by public transport.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Chair thanked the Chief Executive, Executive Director and Associate Director for the presentation and the Committee noted the update.

Resolved – That the update on the Our Futures Transformation Programme be noted.

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47. Slough Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan (STIP)

The Associate Director Place Operations introduced a report about the concept of a new Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan (STIP) for Slough. The report would be considered by Cabinet on 1st February 2021.

The STIP would be the Council's strategy for enabling growth and regeneration in the town. It was linked to a range of other strategies such as the Five Year Plan, Climate Change Strategy and would be a key part of the Covid-19 recovery plan. The high level objectives included protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment to ensure the negative consequences of growth could be mitigated. The transport objectives included reducing the need to travel, promoting sustainable modes and improving access to employment, healthcare and education facilities. It was recognised that Slough was expected to experience strong growth in the coming years and the emerging Local Plan for 2016-2036 was projected to enable 13,000 new homes and 15,000 new jobs. It was therefore important that the Council had a clear transport and infrastructure plan in place to enable this growth in a sustainable way.

(Councillor Sarfraz left the meeting)

The key high level proposals were summarised. The STIP was currently in draft form pending consultation with stakeholders, and the plan would go back to Cabinet later in year following consultation and the development of business cases. Members discussed the engagement with local people and the Officer responded that the consultation on the STIP would primarily be with stakeholders and developers, however, assurance was provided that there would be major consultation with residents on Local Transport Plan 4 later in the year.

Members asked whether the recommendations the Committee had made at its Extraordinary Joint Meeting with the NCS Panel in October on the A4 bus lane had been incorporated into the STIP. It was confirmed that the relevant strategic measures were included, for example in the concept of the A4 cycle "superhighway" which would provide a segregated lane so that cycling was a more attractive alternative to car use. Work on the other specific recommendations made at that meeting was underway. The Committee discussed the future plans for parking in the town centre. The STIP envisaged a reduction in parking provision in the town centre and alternative means of travel such as new park and ride services, walking and cycling were part of the plan. It was recognised that some developers considering locating the town centre wanted parking at or near their sites and this was part of the consultation process with developers to strike the appropriate balance. In relation to a question about the proposed northern expansion of Slough it was noted that this concept had been considered in the growth projections which underpinned the strategy. Members emphasised the importance of several other specific issues such as working with schools to reduce the need to travel and ensuring all strategies took full account of the need to provide adequate levels of disabled parking provision. These points were all noted.

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The Committee noted that local authorities outside of London had limited powers in regulating public transport provision but highlighted the importance of high quality bus services for communities across the borough. It was noted that Council had regular dialogue with bus operators to try to work with them to improve services and infrastructure enhancements and bus priority measures were included in the STIP. Powers could be devolved to local authorities through enhanced partnerships and this may be explored in the future.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee expressed support for the concept of the STIP and endorsed the recommendations which were being put to Cabinet on 1st February 2021.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Committee endorsed the concept of the STIP as the long-term plan for transport infrastructure to support regeneration of the town centre, the emerging Local Plan Spatial Strategy, and the Council's air quality and climate change policies.
- (b) That the significant technical work which had informed the STIP and the relevance of the STIP proposals to ongoing discussions with key town centre landowners and developers be noted.
- (c) That the long-term nature of the proposals and the role of the STIP in supporting future bids for funding to deliver those proposals be noted.
- (d) That the consultation exercise with stakeholders be noted.

48. Performance & Projects Report - Quarter 2 2020/21

The Strategic Insight Manager and Strategic Programme Management Office Manager introduced a report that set out the latest performance information for the second quarter of the 2020/21 financial year to the end of September 2020 including the corporate balanced scorecard indicators, update on 26 key projects and progress on the current Manifesto commitments.

The report included four new performance indicators and new 2020/21 year end targets across the balanced scorecard. The new measures were young people's happiness, percentage of overweight and obese children in reception and year 6 and the number of service requests that took 90 or more days to close. Progress on performance indicators had been variable in Quarter 2, primarily due to significant impacts of the Covid-19. Of the balanced scorecard indicators for the second quarter, nine were 'green', eight were 'amber' and four were 'red'.

The impacts of Covid-19 were highlighted and these included increased unemployment with Slough's claimant count rising from 8.3% to 8.5%; pressures on services; lower Council Tax and Business Rates collection;

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shorter journey time and reduce crime rates. The overall trends had remained broadly in line with the previous quarter. The progress of key projects was summarised and it was noted that 46% were 'green', 35% were 'amber' and 19% were 'red'. Key achievements during the reporting period were the hotels project on the Old Library Site which was nearing completion ahead of schedule and progress on preparations for the Census 2021. In relation to reporting on manifesto commitments 22 were categorised as complete, 18 were 'green' and 3 were 'amber' with 0 were 'red'.

Members asked about the changes to indicators being reported on and it was noted that two had been removed – percentage of waste sent to landfill and empty properties brought back into use to be replaced by the four new indicators.

The following is a summary of the specific queries raised on various indicators:

- Council and business rates collection – it was noted that collection rates had reduced across local authorities due to Covid-19. The Council was taking action to collect revenues, but the number of people claiming benefits and Council Tax Support had risen and would negatively impact on the Council's income.
- Childhood obesity – Slough was marginally above the national rate and the Council and partners had plans in place to seek to reduce the levels. The new performance indicators in the balanced scorecard would ensure Members were kept up to date on progress.
- Journey times – the fall in traffic movements due to Covid-19 had reduced average journey times. The trends would be monitored in 2021 as restrictions were eased and the economy opened up.

Councillor Strutton raised a number of issues under Rule 30. Officers present responded to them wherever possible. More detailed information could be provided outside of the meeting by service managers on any specific queries. A number of the points raised related to the impacts of Covid-19 on the impacts of physical activity during the past year of "lockdowns", demand for mental health services, estate inspections by housing officers and support for people to live independently.

In relation to the Gold Projects Councillor Strutton asked about the progress on the 'Future Delivery of Children's Services'. It was noted that the information in the report was for Quarter 2 which was to the end of September 2021, so the position had moved on considerably since the reporting period. Relevant Officers could provide a more recent update outside of the meeting at the request of Members.

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

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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 progress against the Manifesto commitments be noted.

49. Forward Work Programme

The Policy Insight Manager summarised the Committee's Forward Work Programme and reminded Members that an extraordinary meeting had been arranged for 18th February 2021 to scrutinise the revenue budget, medium term financial strategy, capital strategy and treasury management strategy.

The Work Programme for the scheduled meeting in March was reviewed and it was suggested that a follow up report on the A4 bus lanes be received. The Policy Insight Manager would discuss the potential report with Officers and the Chair of Committee before deciding whether to add it to the work programme.

Members also requested that the Slough Urban Renewal Partnership Business Plan due to be approved by Cabinet in April be considered for scrutiny. In response to a query it was confirmed that the Slough Children's Services Trust transition was in the work programme for the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved – That the Forward Work Programme, as set out in Appendix A of the report be noted.

50. Date of Next Meeting - 18th February 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as the extraordinary meeting to be held on 18th February 2021.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.40 pm)