

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 18th May, 2020.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Hulme, Smith and Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART 1

125. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

126. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th March 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th March 2020 be approved as a correct record.

127. SBC Response to COVID-19

The Director of Transformation introduced a report that detailed the Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic. The strategy and risk register were appended to the report and were reviewed by Cabinet. It was noted that the Council's focus had been to ensure the needs of the community were met and that the most vulnerable people had been supported.

The Council had moved swiftly to manage the crisis and implement business continuity arrangements to maintain critical services. Key universal services such as weekly waste collection and grounds maintenance had continued uninterrupted and other staff had been enabled to work from home wherever possible, in line with government guidance. A Gold and Silver command structure, supported by a range of task groups, had been established and a report summarising the decisions taken was detailed in a separate report.

The Cabinet acknowledged the significant amount of work that had gone in to the initial response to an unprecedented and rapidly evolving situation. It was recognised that the Council was still in the early stages of its response and a separate report set out the approach to recovery and renewal, and the financial implications. Lead Members discussed some of the key issues in the next phase of the response, including the role of local authorities in the 'track and trace' system. Members emphasised the importance of strong partnership working with NHS including the timely sharing of data and information to inform decision making.

The impacts on Council staff were raised and it was noted that front line staff had been praised for their response. 85% had been able to work from home and plans were being made for a phased re-entry back into the workplace in

Cabinet - 18.05.20

line with social distancing guidelines. Staff absence and wellbeing was being managed.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton raised a number of points including adherence to social distancing guidelines for Council staff at Landmark Place and whether the Council's Brexit planning had helped it prepare, for example in readiness to redeploy staff. It was noted that Councillor Strutton had submitted a request for further information on the Council's early response as the coronavirus threat escalated in January and February.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet noted the Council's coronavirus response to date and the risk register. The next steps would be agreed in a separate report on recovery and renewal.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Council's response to Coronavirus to minimise the impact on our communities be noted;
- (b) That the risk register be noted; and
- (c) That the next steps be agreed as set out in the report and noting the separate report on recovery and renewal.

128. SBC COVID-19 Recovery & Renewal Planning

The Cabinet received a presentation on the plans for recovery and renewal following the response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The report recommended a recovery strategy based on the delivery of key outputs, outcomes and milestones in three inter-related stages:

- Stage One – Response over 1-5 months focusing on short term impacts on key services and business continuity.
- Stage Two – Recovery over 6-24 months would promote a whole-organisation approach to improve health and wellbeing, economic growth and cohesion.
- Stage Three – Renewal over 25-60 months to make SBC a more resilient, people centred organisation and completing significant regeneration programmes.

The approach would be founded on strong partnership working and community engagement to carry forward the momentum from the One Slough community response. Members supported the commitment to work closely with the voluntary and community sector and discussed a range of issues such as the impact on regeneration schemes. Assurance was provided that work had continued on the planning and delivery of a range of both Council and privately led schemes such as the Horlicks redevelopment, Heart of Slough North West Quadrant site and town centre regeneration. The support

Cabinet - 18.05.20

for rough sleepers had been welcomed and options were being prepared to use the opportunity to support people beyond the immediate crisis.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton welcomed many aspects of the recovery and renewal plans and emphasised the importance of providing ongoing support for carers and to review planning policies relating to the mix and density of housing to provide healthy environments and spaces for residents.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

That the Council's plans for medium term recovery and long term renewal as an organisation, for Slough the place and our communities be agreed. Specifically to:

- (a) Develop two separate but related plans:
 - 1. The 2 year recovery plan (Joe Carter)
 - 2. The 5 year renewal plan (Stephen Gibson)
- (b) Establish a sub-group to work on planning reporting to the Recovery and Renewal Group
- (c) Establish a joint Working Group of Cabinet and Scrutiny to work together to contribute to the work.

129. COVID-19 Decisions

The Service Lead Governance introduced a report that summarised the significant decisions taken by Officers in response to the coronavirus emergency and sought Cabinet approval to ratify these decisions insofar as they related to executive matters. The timeline of the 'lockdown' and Constitutional provisions for delegated decision making in emergency situations was noted.

The Gold and Silver command structure, supported by a number of task groups, had been established to enable the Council to respond quickly to the rapidly evolving emergency situation. Decisions taken included setting up a hub to distribute food to vulnerable people, housing rough sleepers, reviewing critical SBC services, allocating the additional funding from central government, access to Council buildings, parks and allotments and wide range of other matters. The relevant Lead Members had been briefed and consulted where possible and appropriate in taking these decisions.

The report would also be presented to the Annual Meeting of Council to be held on 21st May 2020 for ratification of decisions relating to Council side functions.

Cabinet - 18.05.20

After due consideration, the significant decisions were ratified.

Resolved – That the report be noted and to ratify the significant decisions taken by officers since the “lockdown” came into force, set out in the Schedule to the report.

130. Impact of COVID-19 on the 2020/21 Revenue Budget

The Service Lead Finance introduced a report that detailed the financial implications of Covid-19.

It was estimated that the gross cost to the Council may reach £15.3m and the Government grant of £7.6m so far was therefore insufficient to cover the increased expenditure. The gap of £7.7m was offset by spending reductions of £4.8m which meant an possible £2.9m adverse impact. The figures presented were provisional and there was considerable uncertainty as the situation was changing on a daily basis. The Cabinet was assured that the forecast shortfall could be contained with forecast general reserves for 2020/21, however any further pressures, including the Slough Children’s Services Trust debt position, could result in general reserves dipping below the minimum level. The financial position was been closely monitored to understand the full impacts over time, particularly as the length of ‘lockdown’ was uncertain.

The Cabinet discussed the main financial pressures which included adult social care workforce and PPE costs, homelessness and reduced leisure, parking and commercial income. Lead Members commented that as a result of a track record of strong financial management SBC was in a relatively good position compared to other authorities. However, the pressures and risks were substantial both in the short and medium term given the possibility of further waves of infections and increased costs and demand on Council services.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton asked questions about care costs and the risk to commercial income from assets in the strategic acquisitions programme. These points were answered and any individual cases could be picked up outside of the meeting through appropriate channels.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That it be noted that:

- (a) An initial financial assessment indicates that the gross costs of Covid-19 to the Council may reach £15.3 million.
- (b) Currently, the Government grant to cover Covid-19 costs is insufficient, covering less than half the estimated costs. It amounts to just £7.6 million. This leaves an initial funding gap of £7.7 million.

- (c) Expenditure reductions of £4.8 million have been identified to partly offset this, leaving a possible £2.9 million adverse impact on general reserves.
- (d) The forecast shortfall in funding can be contained within forecast general reserves for 2020/21 although any further pressures, if realised, could lead to general reserves dipping below the recommended minimum, which could lead to the need for a freeze on all non-statutory spending.
- (e) The financial situation needs to be monitored very closely, acknowledging that current estimates remain provisional because the full impacts of the virus are still emerging.

131. SUR Partnership Business Plan 2020/21

The Interim Director of Regeneration introduced a report that updated the Cabinet on Slough Urban Renewal (SUR) and sought approval of the Partnership Business Plan for 2020/21.

The Appendix containing the Partnership Business Plan was in Part II of the agenda, but was considered during Part I without disclosing any of the exempt information.

SUR performance in 2019/20 was summarised and it was noted that 78% of the projects were rated 'green' or 'amber'. The key projects for the coming year included the Old Library Site due to complete in April 2021, progressing planning on the Stoke Wharf and Montem Lane sites and continuing to deliver new housing as part of the Small Sites strategy. The Cabinet welcomed the fact that SUR was one of most successful Local Asset Backed Vehicles of its type in the country and it had a track record of delivering a range of projects and financial returns to the Council.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton asked whether Covid-19 would delay construction projects and have a detrimental financial impact to the Council. It was noted that the Old Library Site project had been ahead of schedule and was due to be completed on time even after taking into account the impact of Covid-19. There were uncertainties arising from Covid-19 to future housing and property markets, but the outlook for other SUR projects was being continually assessed and remained positive at this stage.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted and Partnership Business Plan for 2020/21 was approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the performance of SUR for 19/20 as set out in Section 5.4 of the report be noted;

Cabinet - 18.05.20

(b) That the performance targets for SUR for 2020/21 as set out in Section 5.11 to 5.14 of the report be agreed; and to note the intention for SUR Board to review KPI's for this period.

(c) That the Partnership Business Plan for the period to 2025 be agreed.

132. Council Housing 'Buy Backs'

The Lead Member for Housing & Community Safety introduced a report that sought approval to delegate the acquisition of the 'buy backs' of former council housing purchased under the 'Right to Buy' to the Council's Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Service Lead for Housing Development & Contracts.

The proposal was in line with one of the recommendations of the Council's internal auditors from their review conducted in September 2019. The audit had identified that some approvals for the acquisition of buy-back properties had been above the threshold of £250,000 for the acquisition of leasehold interests specified in the Constitution. The audit recommendation was therefore to delegate the acquisition of property for the sole purpose of providing affordable housing that is above £250,000 to the Section 151 Officer.

After due consideration the recommendations set out in Section 5 of the report, including the delegation to the Section 151 Officer, were approved.

Resolved – That the recommendations set out in section 5 of the report be approved.

133. Adoption of New Highway Asset Management Strategy 2020/25

The Service Lead Major Infrastructure Projects introduced a report that sought approval to adopt and publish a new High Asset Management Strategy for the next five years.

The strategy was founded on three key principles for good asset management which were to use an information driven asset management approach to optimise resources; adopt a whole life cost approach to maintaining infrastructure; and to prioritise resources using a risk based approach. The new plan was aligned to the Council's wider strategies and would enable the Council to demonstrate its commitment to sound management of such assets. An up to date management strategy was a core requirement of the Department for Transport's incentive funding self-assessment in order to achieve Level 3 maturity.

The Lead Member for Sustainable Transport & Environmental Services commented on the importance on having a clear strategy and framework to manage its highways assets. Investment levels over many years had ensured that highway infrastructure in Slough was well maintained. Additional capital of £1m had been invested this year for local schemes.

Cabinet - 18.05.20

After due consideration, the strategy was approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the new highway asset management strategy for 2020 – 2025 be approved.
- (b) That the new highway asset management strategy is published on www.slough.gov.uk.
- (c) That Officers implement the new strategy within the highways function and provide regular reports on progress.

134. Contracts in Excess of £180,000 in 2020/21

The Cabinet considered a report detailing the contracts with an estimated value of over £180,000 that were proposed to be let in the 2020/21 financial year.

The contracts listed in Appendix A to the report were included in approved budgets and all contracts would be let in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules. It was noted that the Council had agreed to reduce the threshold for such approvals from £250,000 to £180,000 when it approved the new Contract Procedure Rules last year.

After due consideration, the Cabinet endorsed the list of contracts at Appendix A.

Resolved – That the list of contracts attached at Appendix A be endorsed.

135. References from Overview & Scrutiny

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

136. Notification of Forthcoming Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Key Decisions published on 20th April 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 May and August 2020 be endorsed.

137. 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

Cabinet - 18.05.20

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.

138. SUR Partnership Business Plan - Appendix

The Slough Urban Renewal Partnership Business Plan was approved in Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

139. Acquisition of land at AkzoNobel and Masterplan Approach to the future development of the area

An approach was agreed to seek to acquire land on the Akzo Nobel site to provide housing and to develop a masterplan for the area.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.15 pm)