

People Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 15th December, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Qaseem (Chair), P. Bedi (Vice-Chair), Bal, Begum, Brooker and Matloob

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Basra

PART 1

17. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bal declared that his daughter worked for Slough Borough Council (SBC). Councillor Brooker declared that he was a member of the Audit Committee.

They remained and participated in the meeting.

18. Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 October 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2022 be approved as a correct record subject to the following tabled amendments from the Interim Director of People (Children):

Page 2: Minute 14 (para 4) – replace January 2021 with *January 2022*. In the penultimate line add *comprehensive* before early help and in the final line replace public with *voluntary*.

Page 2: Minute 14 (para 5) – replace C5 (Core Five) with *Children’s Social Care*.

Page 3: Minute 14 (para 7) – replace Head of Children’s Services with *Interim Director of People (Children)*.

19. Member Questions

No Member Questions had been submitted.

20. Financial Overview

The Deputy Director Financial Management (Interim) presented the Panel with a detailed overview of the financial context facing the Council. Members were reminded that the focus of scrutiny at the stage was to consider and comment on the specific budget proposals.

(Councillor Bedi joined the meeting)

People Scrutiny Panel - 15.12.22

During discussion, the Deputy Director Financial Management (Interim) responded to Members' questions and comments as set out below:

What would happen if Slough was unable to repay its short term loans and would it be possible to repay the loans without further borrowing?

The interest on the loans would potentially increase and it would also depend on when the full loan payments were due. To avoid further borrowing it was important that the asset disposal programme was successfully delivered to generate capital receipts.

Was there contingency plan in the event of assets proposals not being disposed of as quickly as planned? With the projection of significant asset sales anticipated over 2022/23 and 2023/24, it was critical for the recovery of the council's finances that these were achieved. Critically, if these were not achieved, it would lead to higher borrowing costs thus leading to reductions to council services, it was therefore vital for the council to reduce loans.

Would there be any further changes to the current figures in the 2018/2019 accounts, which had not yet been signed off? The accounts for that year were currently being audited and a number of significant adjustments had been made to those previously prepared by the former financial team. Once the accounts were signed off it would set a clearer baseline from which to move forward.

Were the council's current estimated revenue savings achievable? All savings from directorates had business cases and robust processes to determine that they were deliverable before being included in the budget. In terms of next year, it would also be important to consider the implications of the local government finance settlement in order to establish whether the council had sufficient savings to close the gap for 2023/24.

What were the key variables in achieving more savings? Savings needed to be owned and delivered by officers in service areas. The actions were required to be delivered in order to achieve the savings and would require officers to be committed in delivering those savings, or identifying alternative savings.

Were there any particular departments that had been identified to make more savings? Savings of £15m for 2023/24 had been identified over the past few months and all directorates had worked very hard reviewing and achieving further savings.

What were the reasons that other councils were seeking their loans to be repaid and was it because the council was not making repayments? With the current financial position of the council and significant changes to market conditions, local authorities that had lent to SBC had indicated they would not extend their loan agreements. The Panel was assured that the Council was meeting all of its obligations to lenders and had a clear plan in place to reduce borrowing as asset sales were completed.

Resolved – That the details of the financial overview be noted.

21. Adults Social Care Budget Proposals 2023/24

The Executive Director People (Adults) gave an extensive outline of Adults Social Care Budget proposal for 2023/24. Members noted that as at the period of September 2022, the Adult Social Care directorate had a 2022/23 net budget of £28,441m, which comprised of a gross controlled expenditure of £57.626m and a gross income budget £29.184m, including £7m Better Care Fund (BCF). As part of the budget for 2022/23, the directorate set a savings target of £5.900m. The Executive Director People (Adults) reported that the forecast outturn for 2022/23 as at period 6 was nil variance and that the directorate had proposed savings of £4.962m towards the Council's overall target for 2023.24 for review by the Scrutiny Panel.

Members were informed that the Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) had been prepared and available in relation to these proposals, three of which had been assessed to have equalities impacts, which required a full assessment to be undertaken.

Emerging pressures expected in 2023/24 included:

- Cost of living crisis with potential for increased request for support from clients, providers and others.
- Staff resource impact on business as usual (BAU).
- Preparation for Cost of Care reform (currently delayed) and Care Quality Commission (CAC) inspection.
- Clients with increasing complex needs.
- Care market stability
- The Council's underlying position.

The Executive Director People (Adults) responded to Members' questions and comments, some of which are set out below:

A member acknowledged and welcomed the savings that had been achieved. It was stressed that this was a clear direction and should the need to take mitigating action/review arise, this would be delivered.

A member asked whether the process for establishing local solutions in respect of the provision of services had begun. Members were reassured that processes and provisions that were required to be put in place were being reviewed but this would take time. Preparations were also ongoing for CQC assessment, but staff were aware of the tasks in hand.

A member asked whether it would not be more beneficial for care services to be provided by the Council, instead of making direct payments. The National Health Service (Direct Payments) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 created a variation for people so that they could design their own packages. People were with the challenge of managing their own money and approximately 35/40% of services were being delivered through direct payment.

People Scrutiny Panel - 15.12.22

A Member raised concerns that some people may not be able to manage their own budget and queried that this may be the start of the privatisation of social care. It was highlighted that there were concerns about financial exploitation and abuse but these were being managed by the team, and a number of safeguarding mechanisms were in place to try to minimise and protect people from financial abuse. The local authority did not manage people's direct payments but if they did so, would require a small payment to be made. It was confirmed that making direct payment was not the start of privatisation of social care.

A Member applauded the reduction of the previous savings proposal of £7m to £5m. It was confirmed that this savings had been extended to £5.9m.

A Member asked what had been learned about achieving targets and what lessons could be taken forward to achieve this year's targets. It was explained that:

- Having had the opportunity to reflect had been valuable and having the quality of data over 19 months.
- Strengthening the team by having a finance officer.
- Having a joint vision and ensuring the plan was clear to the workforce.

A Member asked whether there were any risks of statutory duties not being met. The Panel was informed that there was likely to be a degree of risk from providers but relationship would be strengthened with other providers and continually review to avoid such risks.

A member asked whether there was any support for people in care to develop skills to become independent. It was explained that a national survey had concluded that most people wished to be independent and therefore, the aim was to ensure that as many people in Slough gained independence as possible. A redesigned reablement service was in place to provide people with those skills.

A member asked whether some of the proposals had been put in place by other local authorities (LA). It was explained that most of the ideas had been derived from elsewhere and many LAs focused on front door services. The LGA had also reviewed the proposals and their recommendations and feedback had been helpful in providing a temperature check for Slough.

A Member highlighted the proposal 9 (Reablement Efficiencies) to restructure the service to better align staffing resources to service requirement, they expressed concerns about the possible impact on staff being overloaded, experiencing burnout, which may in turn result in affecting the delivery of services. Members were reassured that the proposal was not to restructure, but rather to bring in different skills set to support people with their disabilities.

A Member asked for a reflection on the past year in relation to proposal 8 (Direct Payment recouPMENT). It was explained that this was the recouPMENT

People Scrutiny Panel - 15.12.22

of payments that had not been used and that no risks were involve, as money recouped would be reused for someone else in need.

A Member highlighted that the impact assessment on disability data had been based on the 2011 Census, and asked whether this would be different to the 2021 Census. Members were advised that this was the data available at the time.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Panel noted the budget savings proposals and did not make any specific amendments or alternative proposals.

Resolved – That details of the Adult Social Care directorate 2023/24 budget proposals be noted.

22. Members' Attendance Record

Resolved – That the Members' attendance record be noted.

23. Date of Next Meeting - 30 January 2023

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 30 January 2023.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.53 pm)