

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 18th March, 2021.

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

Apologies for Absence:- None.

PART I

58. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

59. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 28th January 2021 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 18th February 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2021 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 18th February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

60. Member Questions

No Member Questions had been received.

61. Performance & Projects Report: Quarter 3 2020/21

The Strategic Programme Management Officer Manager introduced a report that provided the Committee with the latest performance information and project updates for the third quarter of the 2020/21 financial year to the end of December 2020.

As the information was for the third quarter the trends would be a good indicator of the year end position. The cancellation of exams meant some of the education indicators were not comparable with previous years and the impacts of Covid-19 were evident in a wide range of performance indicators. Due to the cancellation of the local elections in 2020 the manifesto reporting was for pledges from 2019.

The portfolio of major projects was reviewed and it was reported that 12 were rated 'green', 12 'amber' and 2 'red'. The Committee noted the actions being taken in relation to the 'red' rated projects. In relation to manifesto reporting, 40 pledges were either 'completed' or 'green' and 3 were 'amber'. Performance against balanced scorecard indicators continued to be variable, largely due to the impacts of Covid-19. There were a number of positive trends reported such as a 2.2% year-on-year improvement in the recycling rate, 56 fewer homeless households and 36 more Houses in Multiple Occupation being licenced. However, indicators behind target included Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Rates which were 4.6% and 9.6%

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lower than at the same time a year ago respectively. Unemployment remained high at 8.4% and crime levels were also relatively high during the reporting period since the easing of the first lockdown. It was noted that reported crime levels had dropped during lockdowns but violent crime, public order offences and criminal damage remained relatively high during the year.

Members discussed the crime figures and asked what steps were being taken to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. The role of the Safer Slough Partnership was highlighted and the Committee noted that the partnership was due to present a detailed report to the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel in April. A further breakdown of crime figures was requested and Members wanted to carry out further scrutiny of the levels of crime and community safety and it was agreed that members of the Committee would be welcome to attend the NCS Scrutiny Panel meeting.

Concern was also expressed about the rising unemployment rate and particularly the impact on young people in the town. Members asked what actions the Council was taking and it was responded that the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy included projects such as the Skills Hub and Innovation Space. A number of other queries were raised during the course of the discussion about specific performance issues in the report which would require more detailed responses from service areas. It was agreed the Committee would be provided responses to the following questions arising from the discussion:

- Unemployment had risen quite significantly and Members expressed concerns about youth unemployment, especially as furlough would be phased out this year. As the economy re-opened what steps was the Council taking to support and grow jobs?
- There were concerns about sustained level of rising crime and Members felt previous reports to the committee had not provided sufficient information. A request was made for a breakdown of areas affected by crime and Members would be invited to the NCS Scrutiny Panel meeting in April which included an update from the Safer Slough Partnership.
- In relation to HMO licensing, how were tenants and households being proactively contacted to ensure they were licenced?
- What was being done to help children in Slough catch up on learning as a result of Covid-19?
- How many children had been sent home of school due to Covid-19 cases/outbreaks?
- Why were 20% of children not getting their first preference of school?
- What was being done to ensure the town was being made more accessible for people with disabilities?
- Why was Manifesto Pledge 3 being shown as 'complete' when bus fares had not reduced and when only one pilot scheme had taken place?
- In relation to Manifesto Pledge 11, where were the allotments on Moray Drive?

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- In relation to Manifesto Pledge 20, how many dental practices, partners and schools had been consulted with?
- Information on the Slough Town Association of Residents should be on the Council website and Central ward councillors needed to be briefed on the engagement with members/residents on town centre regeneration.

The Committee was reminded that the report provided a high level overview of performance indicators and projects and some of the issues raised would be informative in developing the scrutiny work programmes in the new municipal year. At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted and Members requested the further information listed above by 8th April 2021.

Resolved –

- (a) 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 manifesto commitments be noted.
- (b) That further information be provided to the Committee on the matters raised during the course of the discussion.

62. Slough 2040 Vision

The Policy Insight Manager gave a presentation to the Committee on the development of the 2040 Vision for Slough.

The context to the Vision was explained. The Five Year Plan set out the medium term strategic priorities for the Council, however, it had been decided that there would be benefits in producing a longer term, strategic vision for the town. There had been extensive engagement over the past year with strategic and voluntary partners to develop an ambition shared vision for the next twenty years – 'Slough 2040'. A project team had been put in place and they had worked with residents, elected Members, businesses and partners to develop a picture of what stakeholders wanted Slough to be like in 20 years.

The feedback was subsequently analysed, and the leaders' group had agreed the following vision statement:

“Slough will be a vibrant, thriving and innovative town, where people are supported to live happy and fulfilled lives. People will feel safe and valued in their local communities, and proud to call Slough home.”

This vision statement was underpinned by eight priority areas, which would be the focus for delivery:

- *“Slough will have a vibrant town centre, brimming with diverse and exciting culture.*

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- *Slough will have attractive, green neighbourhoods, which bring people together.*
- *Slough will be a globally connected town, with a transport system which prioritises public and active transport.*
- *Slough will be a carbon-neutral and sustainable town.*
- *Slough will have a strong, globally renowned economy, which supports its people to prosper and live well.*
- *Slough will be a place of lifelong learning and aspiration for all.*
- *Slough will be a healthy town, where people are supported to live empowered lives.*
- *Slough will have a strong, diverse community where differences are celebrated, and everyone feels safe.”*

Partners had been asked to agree the vision and the Cabinet had endorsed it on behalf of SBC on 22nd February 2021. Members discussed the next steps to make such a high level vision meaningful for the town and for residents. It was responded that there would be a series of public events when possible. It was not proposed that the vision would be regularly revised as it was designed to be the high level approach to which other plans and strategies would align, including the Five Year Plan. The approach to delivery would be regularly reviewed in the plans that sat below the vision and the establishment of the leaders' group was a positive step in bringing partners together. The aim was to set out the longer term aspirations and tell the story of Slough.

The Committee discussed the importance of resident engagement and asked how this had been down during Covid-19 restrictions. Attempts had been made to engage a wide range of people and organisations and this process would continue over time.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Cabinet's endorsement of the Slough 2040 Vision be noted.
- (b) That future scrutiny of relevant aspects and priorities of the 2040 vision be considered in setting the work programmes for the Committee and its scrutiny panels in 2021/22.

63. SBC Covid Recovery Strategy Update

The Associate Director, Place Strategy & Infrastructure introduced a report that updated on the Council's Covid Recovery Strategy.

The Council had reacted swiftly in response to the pandemic in March 2020 and in addition to the immediate response it had been developing plans for the economic recovery and renewal of the town. The Recovery Strategy was aligned to the Five Year Plan and 2040 Vision. It was noted that the Government had set out a 'Roadmap' to ease restrictions from the current national lockdown and this would help start the process of economic recovery.

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The priorities of Slough's recovery plan included supporting business recovery and reopening; supporting vulnerable residents, for example with debt advice; tackle backlogs in demand for services; improving access to Council services through the new operating model; building on the community and partnership work of One Slough; and adapting to the workforce flexibility that had become a feature of the past year. A key priority was to tackle the rise in unemployment and the Committee was updated on the Future Skills Hub and Slough Innovation Space projects.

(Councillor Sarfraz left the meeting)

Members highlighted the importance of building up a very clear understanding of the labour market with high quality data and information to ensure action plans and projects were properly targeted. It was important to ensure practical support was provided, for example, the www.berkshireopportunities.co.uk website that had recently gone live to help people find new jobs did not appear to have a high number of available positions in Slough. Officers were therefore asked to ensure that as many local jobs as possible were advertised through such sites and that other practical help was in place such as support for CV writing and interview techniques. In relation to data and intelligence, the Associate Director commented that one of the key features of the Council's new operating model was a data and insight team to help inform plans and service delivery. The Committee also discussed the impact of changing working patterns arising from the pandemic and the type of businesses that may benefit from the Slough Innovation Space project.

It was noted that a further report on the innovation space and skills hub projects would be presented to the Committee and to Cabinet later in the year. The report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the updated on the Council's Covid Recovery Strategy be noted.
- (b) That an update on the Future Skills Hub and Innovation Space projects be presented to the Committee later in 2021.

64. Proposed Scrutiny Panel Structure

The Policy Insight Manager introduced a report that sought the Committee's formal endorsement for the proposed new scrutiny panel structure.

The proposed changes sought to improve the alignment to the new directorate structure and to Cabinet portfolios; balance the relative workloads of the panels; reduce duplication of some policy areas; and clarify the most appropriate group to take forward work on key priority areas such as employment and skills.

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The appendix to the report set out the proposed structure. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee would lead on overarching strategies and oversee the work of three scrutiny panels:

- People Scrutiny Panel, which combined children and adult services;
- Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel; and
- Place Scrutiny Panel.

The proposal had been developed by the Joint Cabinet Scrutiny Working Group and would be considered by the Member Panel on the Constitution which would decide whether to recommend the changes to Council. Members were supportive of the new structure and agreed that it be endorsed. Members sought assurance that the new structure would have adequate resources to support scrutiny following the staffing restructure. The Policy Insight Manager responded that responsibility for scrutiny would be moving to democratic services and that there was a high level corporate commitment to ensure the scrutiny process was well supported and effective. Members asked that future reports set out more specifically the resources that would be available to the scrutiny function to carry out its roles.

Recommended – That the proposed amendments of the Constitution at Article 6 and Part 4.5 to reflect the new structure of scrutiny panels be endorsed.

65. Forward Work Programme

The Policy Insight Manager summarised the Committee's Forward Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

The work programme for the meeting scheduled for 8th April included Slough Urban Renewal Partnership Business Plan and Gender Pay Gap reporting, both of which were in the Cabinet forward plan for April. However, these reports had been deferred from Cabinet and would not therefore be ready for scrutiny.

Following discussion, it was proposed and agreed that the meeting be re-arranged for later in April with a report on the new model for children's services in Slough and the standing items for April of the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report for 2020/21 and the Petitions Annual Summary.

Members had also expressed an interest in the work of the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP). It was noted that the SSP would be presenting a report to the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel in April and Overview & Scrutiny Committee members would be invited to that meeting.

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

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66. Members' Attendance Record

Resolved – That the Members' Attendance Record for 2020/21 be noted.

67. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting, currently scheduled for 8th April 2021, would be re-arranged to a new date later in April.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.31 pm)