

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 9th July, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Mohammad (Vice-Chair), Basra, Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, D Parmar, S Parmar, and R Sandhu (until 7.30pm)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Sarfraz (currently on maternity leave)

PART I

12. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

13. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11 June 2020

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th June 2020 be approved as a correct record.

14. Member Questions

None had been received.

15. Slough Violence Task Force

The Group Manager - Community Safety introduced a report that provided an update on the work of the Slough Violence Task Force.

The Task Force had been formed in October 2019 to provide a multi-agency, co-ordinated approach to address the issue of serious violence in Slough. It brought together a range of partners from Health, Children and Adult services, Safer Slough Partnership, Youth Services, and the voluntary sector to focus on tackling the issue.

Three sub groups had been formed (Data and Insight, Violence Reduction Interventions and Communications) in order to work across a range of statutory and voluntary groups to understand and identify the causes of violence, map the current provision of service delivery, and to create a communications plan. The findings of the three sub groups were used to inform the creation of a live action plan. The plan was an evolving document and was used as a project management tool.

In concluding, the presentation the Group Manager – Community Safety informed Members that whilst work of the Task Force had continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, officers were acutely aware that the landscape was continually changing and there was a need to reflect and review as the Task Force moved forward. Work was ongoing to adapt

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processes, form new projects and establish interventions to reduce the impact of violence in Slough.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A Member asked how the work of the Task Force had progressed during the Covid-19 lockdown period. What challenges the Task Force had faced and what it had achieved to date. It was explained that work had been focussed on building effective partnership working to improve communication and establish interventions.
- In relation to early intervention strategies, a Member asked if work was being undertaken with both primary and junior aged school pupils. It was confirmed that the Interventions sub group actively engaged with both primary and junior school aged pupils. In addition, work with the voluntary sector and the Youth Parliament was being developed.
- It was queried if Slough had a similar level of violence to other areas in the Thames Valley. It was confirmed that Slough was comparable to neighbouring areas. In some respects Slough was safer than nearby areas in the Thames Valley and London; however Slough faced particular challenges, which the Task Force aimed to address.
- A Member requested some information about the total crime figures for Slough compared to nearby Oxford, Reading and Milton Keynes. The Group Manager - Community Safety agreed to circulate the information to the Committee.
- It was asked what impact the Task Force had on the level of violence in Slough. It was explained that the work of the Task Force was developing and data to demonstrate impact was not yet available.
- A Member asked what was being done to tackle the issue of knife crime in Slough. It was explained that knife crime was a global challenge and a complex issue to resolve. The Task Force had adopted a collaborative approach and would be undertaking work with young people to address the issue in Slough.
- The Committee was informed that clear communication with residents was central to the work of the Task Force and a number of media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and the Council's web site were being used to engage with the community.
- A Member asked if an increase in the number of police officers in Slough would reduce levels of violence. It was explained that whilst sufficient police resource was important, it was not possible to 'police our way out of knife crime and violence' and that adopting a 'Public Health approach' by developing strategies to divert young people away from knife crime and violence were crucial in tackling these issues.

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- A Member asked what the average police response attendance time was. It was explained that this question would be best addressed by the Chief Constable when he next attended an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- It was queried if the installation of additional CCTV in Salt Hill Park would assist in reducing crime. It was explained that often parks did not have suitable lighting and this inhibited the effectiveness of CCTV; police monitoring of parks and open spaces was considered as a more effective solution.
- A Member asked how the impact of the Task Force would be measured. It was explained that the work was being undertaken to understand the data available. The Task Force would be considering performance monitoring and working with partner agencies to establish a suitable metric to monitor levels of violent crime. The data collated by the Safer Slough Partnership would be used as a baseline to inform the future work of the Task Force.
- With regard to early interventions, it was queried if young people were made aware of the impact of illegal substance misuse. Members were informed that a 'Choices Programme' was being rolled out in primary and secondary schools in Slough to educate pupils about the consequences of making 'good' and 'bad' choices.
- A Member suggested that when police responded to a report of crime, they should do so without using a car siren, as this provided the offender with an opportunity to run away from the scene. It was suggested that this comment be addressed by the Chief Constable when he next attended an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- A Member requested information about the uptake of apprenticeships by young people who had been permanently excluded from school. The Group Manager - Community Safety agreed to contact the Service Lead, Communities and Leisure for details and to circulate a response to the Committee.

(Councillor R Sandhu left the meeting)

The Chair thanked the Group Manager - Community Safety for the presentation and report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Group Manager – Community Safety be requested to circulate the additional information requested, as detailed above, to the Committee.

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16. Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy

The Economic Development Manager introduced a report that summarised the Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy and sought comments from the Committee to feed into the Action Plan that was currently being developed.

Members were informed that the Inclusive Growth Strategy provided a strategic framework for the Council to develop and deliver key initiatives to support the local economy to grow, flourish and succeed.

The Chair invited Members to comment and ask questions.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A Member commented that the Strategy document was too lengthy and unwieldy and therefore it was unlikely to be read by residents. In addition, concern was raised that it lacked detailed data to provide an overview of the current economic landscape. It was suggested that the document be edited, so that it could be easily understood and used by members of the community.
- Concern was raised that the Action Plan lacked reference to the current economic circumstances faced by Slough residents in light of Covid-19. It was highlighted that there were currently 19,000 people in Slough furloughed, facing the possibility of redundancy at the end of the Government's furlough scheme. It was requested that Council officers sought information from local employers about the anticipated number of redundancies in Slough at the end of the furlough scheme.
- A Member noted that Heathrow Airport, referenced as a 'strategic partner' in the Strategy was currently contracting and unlikely to generate additional employment opportunities in the short-medium term. It was highlighted that protecting jobs should be a key priority of the Council. It was requested that Council officers established a clear picture of the local economy prior to the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board meeting scheduled to be held on 28th July 2020.
- The Committee was informed that officers were currently in the process of creating a Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy summary document that would soon be available on the Council's website. The summary document would present data and information in a digestible format. Slough Borough Council's Chief Executive was in the process of collating local employment and projected redundancy data to present to the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board on 28th July 2020. The Council had set up a Response and Recovery Team and it was agreed that the Economic Development Manager would circulate information to the Committee regarding the actions taken by the Team to mitigate

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the loss of jobs in Slough. With regard to the role of Heathrow Airport, it was reported that Council officers would be attending a round table meeting with Heathrow representatives and discussions would be held regarding the types of support and interventions Heathrow could put in place and how the Council could work with Heathrow to retain jobs in Slough. The importance of understanding business and supply chains would be highlighted. In addition, Heathrow would be asked to indicate what interventions and support they could provide to mitigate the detrimental social impact of job losses.

- A Member asked how the Strategy would promote the revival of Slough high street. It was explained that officers were working with the Slough Business Improvement District Town Centre Manager to regenerate the high street. It was highlighted that the revival of Slough high street was a key priority of the Strategy and was at the forefront of the delivery of the Action Plan. The Economic Development Manager agreed to extract the relevant section in the Action Plan and circulate it to the Committee.
- A Member asked if the Council had used all of its Apprenticeship Levy funding. It was agreed that the Economic Development Manager would seek this information from the Council's HR department and circulate the data to the Committee.
- It was reported that discussions were currently being held about establishing Further Education providers in the Borough and degree apprenticeships; the Strategy would be focussed on utilising both Higher Education and Further Education providers.
- Referring to the Risk Management table set out in section 4 of the report, the Economic Development Manager was asked to elaborate on the risk relating to the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board. It was explained that there was a need to ensure the right representation of partners were present on the Board to support the implementation of the Strategy.
- Clarification was sought regarding the reference to 'Slough 2040 Vision'. It was explained that this related to the long-term future and vision for Slough and the importance of aligning all of the Council's strategies. Councillors would be receiving an invite to the Slough 2040 Vision Conference being held on 27th July 2020.
- A Member requested that measurable targets for the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board be set. It was explained that the Board would be creating targets to ensure its objects were delivered.
- In relation to page 13 of the Strategy document 'Digging Deeper: People & Skills' and the reference 'Slough's success in attracting skilled migrant labour from far and wide'. It was noted that Brexit would have implications for the local labour market and Slough's ability to

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attract international talent. In addition, the importance of 'home grown talent' was acknowledged. It was agreed that these matters would be referenced at the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board meeting on 28th July 2020.

- A Member commended the information set out on page 16 of the Strategy in relation to 'Slough's 3 key drivers of future growth'.
- It was highlighted that traffic congestion and access in Slough was a key challenge that needed to be addressed by the Inclusive Growth Strategy. It was requested that this matter be referenced at the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board meeting on 28th July 2020.
- Referring to page 50 of the Strategy document, it was requested that 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee' be added to the list of 'key performance and monitoring forums'.
- In order to engage with residents, a Member urged officers to streamline the number of strategy documents produced and to ensure that information in the public domain could be readily understood by residents.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Economic Development Manager for the comprehensive report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Economic Development Manager be requested to provide the requested additional information, as detailed above, to the Committee.
- (b) That the comments raised, as detailed above, be referenced at the Regeneration, Economy and Skills Board meeting scheduled to be held on 28th July 2020.
- (c) That the comments raised during the discussion, as detailed above, be used to inform the strategic priorities of the Inclusive Growth Strategy and Action Plan.

17. Capital Monitoring Report at 31st March 2020

The Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151) introduced a report that provided a summary of spend against capital budget for the 2019-20 financial year, as at the end of March 2020, and set out the 2020-21 Capital Programme.

Members were referred to the main items of Capital Programme expenditure set out in the table in section 5 of the report.

The Chair invited Members to comment and ask questions.

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During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A Member requested information regarding the commercial rent received from the Council owned Odeon cinema in Basingstoke. The Interim Head of Financial Management agreed to circulate the commercially sensitive information to the Committee outside of the meeting. It was confirmed that during the Covid-10 pandemic the Council had continued to receive the commercial rents owed.
- Additional information was sought regarding the procurement of a new refuse fleet and the cemetery extension project. It was explained that refuse fleet vehicles had an optimum lifespan, and the assets were replaced on a revolving programme. Refuse fleet vehicles had a 7-10 year life cycle, after which time it became uneconomical to fix vehicles needing repair. In relation to the cemetery expansion, the Committee was informed that the expansion was necessary to meet the predicted increase in demand. It was predicted that up until 2060 there would be a continuous 33% increase in number of burials and cremations in Slough. In the prior years approximately £4 million had been spend on new abatement equipment installed at the crematory. The expansion had been rolled out in three phases, with the final phase completing in the 2020/21 financial year.
- A Member asked if the recent statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced any funding for local government to assist with the funding gap created by the impact of Covid-19. The Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151) reported that no additional funding had been referenced in the recent statement. Local authorities were awaiting details of the £500 billion allocation which had previously been announced by the Chancellor.
- It was queried if any of the refuse fleet were electric vehicles. It was explained that there were currently no electric vehicles. In 2017, when the fleet had previously been replaced, there had been concern that there was insufficient infrastructure to maintain and repair electric vehicles. The availability of technology had now improved, so the purchase of electric vehicles may be considered in the future.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report and revised 2020-21 budget, as set out in Appendix C and D of the report, be noted.
- (b) That the Interim Head of Financial Management be request to circulate information to the Committee regarding the commercial rent received from the Council owned Odeon cinema in Basingstoke.

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18. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2019-20 Provisional (Year End) Position

The Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151) introduced a report that provided an update on the provisional financial position of the Council's Revenue Account for 2019-20 financial year.

The 2019-20 approved net budget for the Council was £108.781 million. The provisional total net expenditure was £108.731 million. This gave a provisional surplus of £0.050 million, which was £2.304 million more favourable than the previously forecasted projections reported at the last quarter.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) provisional outturn position was £38.828 million against a provisional income of £35.980 this resulted in a provisional net deficit for the HRA of £2.848 million. The deficit would be made up by a planned contribution from the housing reserves. It was explained that the HRA was a statutory ring-fenced account and any balances at the end of the year had to be carried forward within the account to the next year.

The Chair invited Members to comment and ask questions.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Clarification was sought regarding the relationship of the Children's Trust and the Council. It was explained that the Children's Trust was an independent company established by the Department for Education (DfE) to run children's services. When the Trust was initially set up the Council had provided two months funding in advance, which meant that the Trust now owed a liability to the Council. The Trust had indicated that it would find it very difficult to repay this debt at contract end, due to finish in October 2021. The Council had entered into discussions with the DfE concerning the financial liability. It was the Council's view that the Trust was an independent company set up by the DfE; therefore any outstanding debts at contract end should be met by the Secretary of State for Education. Members were assured that they would be updated on this matter on a regular basis.
- A Member requested some information regarding the Council's current spend on: bus service provision in Slough, and adult learning and skills. The Interim Head of Financial Management agreed to circulate this information to the Committee.
- Members were informed that a Council Budget Book had been published to the Council's website. It was agreed that a link to the web page would be circulated to the Committee.

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- Information regarding the number of Section 106 write-offs was requested. Members were informed that no Section 106 funding had been written-off and monies were always used within the specified timescales.
- In relation to Slough Children's Trust it was reported that officers held discussions with the Trust regularly to monitor and scrutinise budget spends. It was noted that the services of the Trust were demand led and there was a concern that following the lifting of the lockdown restrictions there may be an increase in the number of safeguarding referrals.
- It was asked what steps were taken to minimise the number of debts 'written-off' by the Council. It was explained that a pragmatic 'holistic' approach was adopted to work with debtors. In view of the difficult circumstances being experienced by many residents during the Covid-19 lockdown period the Council had not taken any enforcement action, rather 'softer' reminder letters had been sent. It was explained that every effort was made to recover money owed; however if the debtor was untraceable or had absconded it became uneconomical to pursue. Debts remained on the Council's system in perpetuity and would be followed up if a debtor reappeared.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Interim Head of Financial Management be request to circulate information to the Committee regarding the Council's current spend on adults learning and skills and bus service provision.
- (b) That the Interim Head of Financial Management be requested to provide Members with a web link to the Council's Budget Book.
- (c) That the Committee noted the following:
 - I. The reported underlying provisional financial position of the Council for the year ending 2019-20;
 - II. The Council's provisional reserve balances for the year end 2019-20;
 - III. The budget transfer (virements) for 2019-20 as detailed in section 9 of the report; and
 - IV. The write-offs for the last financial quarter 2019-20 as detailed in section 10 of the report.

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19. SBC Draft Annual Report 2019-20

The Policy Insight Manager introduced a report that presented a draft of the Annual Report 2019-20 setting out the Council's progress and achievements against the Five Year Plan.

The Chair highlight the above national average achievement of schools in Slough providing Early Years Foundation Stage education, as set out in the Leader of the Council's foreword on page 197 of the report. In addition, referring to the introduction provided by the Chief Executive, the Chair highlighted that the Council had maintained key services during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, wished to thank Slough Borough Council staff for their hard work during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

20. Performance & Projects Report: Quarter 3 and 4 2019/20

Consideration was given to the Council's performance during Quarter 3 and 4 of the 2019/20 financial year, as measured by the performance indicators within the balanced scorecard, the projects progress status, and the update against Manifesto Commitments.

A Member highlighted that there had been a reduction in the overall recycling rate from 26.1% in Quarter 2 to 21.9% in Quarter 3. Concern was raised regarding the low percentage of residents recycling waste, and it was suggested that this matter be given further consideration by the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Council's performance during Quarter 3 and 4 of the 2019/20 financial year, as measured by the performance indicators within the balanced scorecard, the projects progress status, and an update against the Manifesto Commitments be noted.
- (b) That the issue of reduced recycling rates be referred to the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.

21. Annual Petitions Report 2019/20

Resolved – That the Annual Petitions Report 2019/20 be noted.

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22. Forward Work Programme 2020/21

The Chair requested that a Frimley Park Hospital representative be invited to attend a future Committee meeting to provide a report on the impact of Covid -19 in Slough.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Policy Insight Manager be requested to schedule a report from Frimley Park Hospital in the Forward Work Programme.
- (b) That subject to the inclusion of the item detailed above, the Forward Work Programme be agreed, as set out in Appendix A of the report.

23. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved - That the details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

24. Date of Next Meeting - 10 September 2020

Resolved – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10th September 2020.

Chair

(Note: Due to a technical delay the meeting opened at 6.40 pm and closed at 8.56 pm)