

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 20th September, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Akram (Vice-Chair), Anderson, Bains, Carter (until 7.49pm), Hulme, Mann and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ali, Gahir and Strutton

PART 1

21. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

22. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th July 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 26th July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

23. Adult Social Care Provider Services

The Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health and the Associate Director of Adult Social Care Operations summarised a report on the review of adult social care provider services. The recommendations included the closure of five provider services for older people and people with learning disabilities currently operated by the Council at Lavender Court, Respond, Priors Day Service, Phoenix Day Service and The Pines Day Service. The report set out the feedback from a recent public consultation and the rationale for the recommended option.

The Lead Member stated that the review aimed to improve services and meet the Council's financial obligations. It was recognised that the Council had responsibilities, and a commitment, to meet the needs of vulnerable people and their families but that this need not be achieved by directly delivering services. The centres had already been significantly disrupted by Covid-19 and people had changed the way they accessed services. The Cabinet noted the options, financial and legal implications. It was noted that there were 107 people currently registered to use the services and the closures would directly impact 61 staff. The annual saving was projected to be £1.1m. If the Cabinet agreed to close the centres the needs of service users would be reassessed with more flexible and personalised support provided. The feedback from the consultation and comments of the People Scrutiny Panel were considered, including a petition requesting the Council not to close the centres which had received more than 800 signatures.

Lead Members had a detailed discussion on the proposal and asked a number of questions of the Associate Director to ensure the costs and savings estimates were robust; to seek more information about alternative provision to be assured that service users needs could be adequately met through services not directly operated by Slough Borough Council; the impacts on carers and families of services users; the likely travel distances and costs to

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alternative provision; the timescale for carrying out the assessments of service users; and the likely number of redundancies if closures were agreed. Officers responded to each of the points raised and commented that the Council had to balance its statutory duties with its financial strategy in the future. The services recommended for closure were some of few remaining provider services and the strategy for adult social care was to continue to move away from being the direct service provider to focus on strategic commissioning and meeting the needs of people in other ways which could include accessing activities or services from other providers such as community groups and charities, using personal assistants, direct payments or accessing other support networks. In relation to the staff, redeployment opportunities would be sought although it was recognised that there would be a significant number of redundancies.

Speaking under Rule 30 Councillor Strutton commented on a number of aspects of the proposal and expressed his concerns about the impact on service users and the fact that some of the facilities had never reopened following refurbishment. He indicated that he had submitted detailed questions to which a response was awaited and would be provided by Officers outside of the meeting. Officers responded to the points raised by Councillor Strutton. Any specific queries about reassessment of individual cases should be raised through the proper channels.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report. To be provided with assurance that the needs of service users was been adequately met in the future it was agreed that the Cabinet and the People Scrutiny Panel was also receive an update in December or January which should include details of any additional transport costs to alternative provision and the staffing implications. Finally, it was agreed that under the delegated provided to implement the decision that there be budget flexibility, if required, to ensure individual needs could be appropriately met through the transitional period.

Resolved –

(a) That the following Provider Services currently operated by the Council be closed:

- Lavender Court
- Respond (short-term breaks service)
- Priors Day Service
- Phoenix Day Service
- The Pines Day Service

(b) That:

- i. the needs and aspirations of all people who use the services currently be reviewed. To identify alternative options, building on people's strengths, across the provider market and through direct payments.

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- ii. flexible and more personalised support be delivered, relying less on providing activities or services that are based at the day centres.
 - iii. individual choice and independence through accessing services that were being delivered by charities, community groups and other organisations in the voluntary and independent sector.
- (c) That the implementation of these recommendations be delegated to the Executive Director of People (Adults), in consultation with the lead member for social care and public health.
- (d) That the comments of the People Scrutiny Panel from its meeting on 13th September 2021 be noted, including the petition requesting the Council not to close the day centres.
- (e) That the Cabinet and People Scrutiny Panel receive an update when the assessment process of service users had been completed to ensure that appropriate alternatives were in place to meet their needs. The update should also include details of transport costs to alternative provision and the redeployment opportunities for staff.
- (f) That there be budgetary flexibility available through the delegation in resolution (c), to continue to meet service users needs through the transitional period.

(Councillor Carter left the meeting)

24. Slough Local Plan - Green Belt Consultation

The Lead Member for Housing, Highways, Planning and Place and the Planning Policy Manager introduced a report that sought approval to commence a consultation on the release of Green Belt land for family housing. The consultation was part of the wider work to develop the Local Plan.

The Lead Member emphasised that consultation was the start of the process and that no decisions on specific sites had been taken. It was recognised that Green Belt release was a sensitive issue and residents were strongly encouraged to respond to the consultation. The Officer highlighted that approximately 90% of new housing units in Slough in recent years had been flats by nature of the sites and developments coming forward. The provision of more family housing was an important priority for the Council to provide a mix of housing in Slough. Any release of Green Belt land would require exceptional reasons.

The Cabinet agreed the consultation and discussed some specific issues relating to some of the sites detailed in the report. Each site had been categorised following an initial assessment although it was recognised a significant amount of technical work would be needed and considered alongside the results of the public consultation. Lead Members commented

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on the importance of securing affordable provision and prioritising local people.

In response to a question from Councillor Strutton under Rule 30 it was confirmed that the Green Belt consultation was not connected to the need to sell land as a result of the Council's financial position.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed, subject to an amendment to the title of the portfolio holder in (b) and (c) which should be the Lead Member for Housing, Highways, Planning & Place.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Draft Consultation Document in Appendix A be agreed as the basis for public consultation on the proposed release of Green Belt sites for family housing.
- (b) That delegated powers be given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing, Highways, Planning & Place, to make minor changes to the document.
- (c) That delegated powers be given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing, Highways, Planning & Place, to make all of the necessary arrangements for a (minimum) six week public consultation exercise on the proposed release of Green Belt sites for family housing.

25. Covid-19 Decisions Update

Details of the significant decisions taken by officers were noted by the Cabinet and ratified insofar as they related to Executive functions, as set out in Appendix A to the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Significant Decisions taken by Silver as set out in Appendix A be ratified.

26. Recovery and Renewal Plan - Achieving Financial Sustainability

The Leader of the Council and the Section 151 Officer introduced a report that set out the current plans for the Council's recovery and renewal towards a position of financial sustainability following the issuing of the s114 notice on 2nd July 2021.

The Cabinet considered the revised version of the report and appendix issued by the Executive Board on 20th September, as published in the Supplementary Agenda, which superseded the version of the report in the

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original agenda pack. The Recovery and Renewal Plan would be referred to Council on 23rd September 2021.

The report explained the approach that would be taken to address the severe financial challenges the Council faced. The current figures indicated a current balance deficit in excess of £200m during the period 2016/17 to 2026/27 if action was not taken. The plan recognised that in order to focus resources on the most vulnerable residents and corporate priorities, fundamental change would be needed which would redefine the role of the Council. A new 5 year plan would be produced for approval by Council in May 2022. The approach would include service reviews, ensure statutory services were being delivered in the most cost effective way, reducing staffing levels, selling the majority of accumulated assets and reducing the size of the capital programme. High level service reviews across the Council would be carried out by Lead Members and Directors by 31 October 2021 to be followed by detailed work on radical service reviews by May 2022. It was proposed that a 'zero based budgeting' approach be taken from 2023/24.

The Leader summarised the intensive work that had been taking place over the summer with Lead Members & Directors making good progress in closing the budget gaps for 2021/22 and 2022/23 and supporting the work to strengthen financial processes and governance. The Cabinet welcomed the clarity and focus that the revised Recovery and Renewal Plan provided and reiterated its commitment to implement the plan and take the decisions necessary to address the financial challenges. The plan provided a much clearer sense of direction and ambition for the Council.

Lead Members highlighted the importance of engaging residents and partners in the process over the coming months and highlighted the opportunities to reassess corporate priorities and 'reimagine' service provision.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton commented on various aspects of the plan and asked a number of questions which the Section 151 Officer and Leader responded to. These included clarification on the value of the Council's assets and proportion that would need to be disposed of. It was noted that a report on this issue would be considered later on the agenda but it was confirmed that that the Council had assets currently valued at £1.2bn and that assets were revalued on a rolling basis. Assurance was provided the processes were in place to achieve Best Value in the disposal of assets.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed to recommend the Recovery and Renewal Plan to full Council on 23rd September 2021.

Resolved – That the revised report and appendix as published prior to the meeting in the Supplementary Agenda be considered and:

- (a) That the plans being developed for the recovery and renewal of Slough Borough Council as set out in Appendix 1 be noted.

- (b) That the timelines set out in this report to achieve the ambitious timescales set out in the Council's recovery and renewal plan be noted.
- (c) That the current plans for the Council's recovery and renewal plan be referred to full Council on 23rd September 2021.

27. Debt Repayment/Asset Disposal Strategy

The Section 151 Officer introduced a report that sought Cabinet to consider and approve a Debt Repayment Strategy and to ask Officers to conduct a procurement exercise to obtain the support of external organisations to assist the Council with the programme of asset disposals over the next five years.

The Cabinet recognised that an orderly programme of asset disposals was required to improve the Council's financial position by realising capital receipts which could be used firstly to finance any Capitalisation Directions that may be received from Government and secondly to repay existing external debt. The report highlighted that if capital receipts of circa £600m could be realised over the next five years it could finance a Capitalisation Direction and reduce borrowing from its current level of £760m to circa £335m by 2027. The aim was to make borrowing manageable and reduce pressure on the revenue budget to support services.

Lead Members discussed the historic financial practices that had contributed to the current position since 2016, including an apparent change in approach to borrowing and treasury management reporting that had not been approved by Members. Assurance was sought that the improvements to financial leadership and governance would ensure such a situation could not occur in the future. The Section 151 Officer stated that the new finance team was committed to implementing the Finance Action Plan to be considered elsewhere on the agenda which would address the issues raised. Members would approve any policy changes annually in the treasury management strategy and a six-monthly report would be provided to Cabinet to monitor progress.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Strutton asked about the potential disposal of Housing Revenue Account assets, the total proportion of assets likely to be disposed of and the feasibility of disposing of the required scale of assets. The Leader and Section 151 Officer responded to the points raised and highlighted that the report in front of Cabinet set out the overall approach that would be taken and that all assets would be reviewed as part of the agreed strategy.

The Cabinet agreed the debt repayment strategy and the recommendation to bring in external expertise to assist the Council in implementing the required disposals.

Resolved –

- (a) That a Debt Repayment Strategy be implemented with immediate effect;
- (b) That Officers conduct a procurement exercise in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, to obtain the support of external organisations who can assist the Council with a programme of asset disposals to generate capital receipts;
- (c) That it be agreed that income generated from asset disposals would be used in the first instance to finance any Capitalisation Directions received from the Government, and that additional sale proceeds thereafter would be used to repay existing external debt.

28. Financial Action Plan

The Section 151 Officer introduced a report that provided the first in a series of updates on work planned and being undertaken to improve all aspects of the Council's financial position.

The report set out the current position and work underway in relation to the accounts, budget, review of companies, internal audit, systems, the finance team and financial management. All projects in the plan had nominated finance team leaders and project plans. In relation to the accounts it was noted that there was an aspiration that three sets of accounts for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 would be prepared by March 2022, although it was recognised this was a challenging target given the volume of work required. The management team and Lead Members had been working intensively over the summer to close the revenue budget gap for 2021/22 and 2022/23 with proposals due to be considered by scrutiny in November. Progress had been made with regards to the capital programme and this would be presented to Members when completed. Work was well underway to cleanse outstanding internal audit recommendations and ensure they have been properly responded to and closed. The short and longer term plans to strengthen the finance team were also noted.

In response to a question from Councillor Strutton under Rule 30 the action being taken to improve the effectiveness of the management and reporting of the Council's subsidiary companies was noted.

The Cabinet welcomed the action being taken to strengthen financial management and agreed to recommend the report to Council on 23rd September 2021.

Resolved –

- (a) That the current position of the financial recovery work be noted; and
- (b) That the report be recommended to Council.

29. Performance & Projects Report - Quarter 1 2021/22

The Cabinet received a presentation on the latest performance information for the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year to the end of June 2021, as measured by the corporate balanced scorecard indicators and updates on key projects.

Covid-19 continued to impact on certain performance measures. Fifteen key performance indicators had been assigned RAG ratings of which seven were 'green', five 'amber'; and three 'red'. The report set out performance improvements in several areas including the average street cleanliness inspection score; increased number of licenses for Houses of Multiple Occupation; a reduction in the number of children requiring repeat Child Protection Plans; and a rise in the proportion of 40-74 year olds receiving NHS health checks, which had been achieved following an innovative approach to link checks to the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

Areas where performance had deteriorated included the physical activity rates of residents; the proportion of household waste sent for recycling due to a reduction in garden waste collected during the winter; and the fact the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation remained high. Unemployment remained a challenge as the economy recovered from the pandemic and the Cabinet asked that ward level data on employment trends be circulated to Lead Members. A number of other specific issues were raised including the attainment gap in Early Years. Members asked for a briefing note on Universal Credit figures for Slough.

Target setting was problematic for certain indicators following Covid-19. Targets for four indicators – direct payments, temporary accommodation, Business Rates and Council Tax collection – had not yet been set, although performance continued to be measured. The Cabinet also considered and noted the progress made on key projects in the portfolio.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had discussed the report at its meeting held on 16th September and Officers would be responding to various detailed issues raised and requests for further information.

At the conclusion of the discussion the performance and projects report was noted.

Resolved – That the Council's current performance as measured by the performance indicators within the balanced scorecard and the progress status of the gold projects be noted.

30. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitor Report - Quarter 1 2021/22

The Section 151 Officer summarised a report that set out the estimated forecast position for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA),

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Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the Capital Programme to the end of June 2021.

The Cabinet noted the considerable work that had been undertaken during this period to verify the 2021/22 budget position and start to address the wide range of financial issues set out in the s114 notice and subsequent reports to Cabinet and Council. The current forecast for the in year position was an overspend of £5.575m, which was an improvement of £1.325m on the previous period. The Cabinet noted the update on DSG and HRA and also noted that work was commencing on the collection fund with an anticipated completion date of 31 October. In view of the scale of work ongoing and to be completed, there was uncertainty in the forecasts and they were likely change from the position reported at the end of first quarter.

The Cabinet noted the report.

Resolved – That the current management position on the 2021/22 accounts be noted:

- (a) The council's forecast cumulative deficit and improvement as at the end of June 2021/22 of £1.325m;
- (b) The forecast General Fund revenue position for 2021/22 as at the end of June 2021 was a £5.575m overspend;
- (c) The progress towards the 2021/22 savings programme;
- (d) The work being done by all parties across the Council to verify the savings identified in the 21/22 budget and action being taken to mitigate the budget gap in the current financial year by 30/9/21;
- (e) The current DSG cumulative deficit was £23.775m and in-year forecast as at the end of June 2021/22 was £4.885m deficit.
- (f) The current forecast spend on Transformation to deliver savings;
- (g) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was forecast to spend to budget for as at the end of June 2021;
- (h) Approved the capital budgets carry forward from 2020/21;
- (i) Noted that the current capital programme was unaffordable, and a number of schemes were being reviewed to determine whether they could be stopped or their scope reduced.
- (j) Noted that funding assumptions in some schemes that

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had been included in the capital programme as funded from capital receipts had been updated.

- (k) Noted the forecast capital spend for 2021/22, pending review of the programme.
- (l) Noted that the capital schemes that had been missed in the 2021/22 budget process would be passed to Council for approval in November 2021.
- (m) Noted that a number of capital schemes in the programme had already commenced without business cases coming to Cabinet for approval. These would come to future Cabinet meetings for retrospective decisions as financial governance was improved.

31. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The comments of the People Scrutiny Panel on the Provider Services Review were noted in considering the report elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no other references from Overview & Scrutiny.

32. Notification of Key Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Key Decisions published on 20th August 2021 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by Cabinet over the next three months.

Resolved – That the published Notification of Key Decisions be endorsed.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.31 pm and closed at 9.43 pm)