

## **Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2022.**

**Present:-** Councillors Begum (Chair), Muvvala (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Kaur, Minhas and Mohammad

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Gahir

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Ali

### **PART 1**

#### **22. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

#### **23. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

#### **24. Member Questions**

There were no Member questions.

#### **25. Learning Skills and Employment: OFSTED Outcome**

The SBC Group Manager, Localities & Neighbourhoods presented a brief overview of the report entitled East Berkshire Community Learning and Skills OFSTED report.

Members asked the following questions and received the following replies:

- What changes had been implemented following the OFSTED inspection in 2019 which had led to the overall improvement in performance of the East Berkshire Community Learning and Skills Service?

The SBC Interim Community Learning and Skills Manager advised that changes had been implemented following the original inspection and the implementation of the new OFSTED education inspection framework, which was more outcomes based. Her team had focussed on following the three I's which focussed on key themes for learners – namely, Intent (whereby learners were clear about what they could expect from the learning process), Implementation (how learners received that learning and the learning journey) and Impact (for example, whether the learner had achieved a particular qualification or acquired a job). During the pandemic, the service as whole had shifted to online learning and had carried out robust and intensive training to implement those changes. There was also a progress and progression monitoring policy in place to help learners achieve their goals.

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- What were the timescales for tackling the three areas identified for improvement in the OFSTED report?

The SBC Interim Community Learning and Skills Manager stated that they were undertaking an assessment of the careers information and guidance service and seeking kitemark approval for a three year period. Classroom walks and one-to-ones had been introduced and the service was delivering training to the Council's customer service teams. Data processes were being reviewed to assess how data could be used to develop existing courses and demonstrate learning. Work was underway with the information management system provider to set the parameters for assessment. These changes had been implemented immediately following publication of the OFSTED report.

- What was the scope of the unit and which areas of Slough did it serve?  
The report stated that there were 265 learners on the programme – could she provide any more detailed figures? Had a needs analysis of the local population been carried out? Was the current provision serving the needs of local population?

The SBC Group Manager responded that there was a joint management committee made up staff from Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough. She undertook to share a breakdown of how many learners were from Slough and how many from Windsor and Maidenhead. The current provision, which had been graded as 'Good' by OFSTED, and been praised for being reflective and flexible to needs of local employers, schools and volunteering opportunities. The DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) had provided a grant for one year to fund the post of a future skills co-ordinator, who would be working closely with all local employers and other learning providers to identify gaps in local employment needs.

- What specific challenges did the service face with online training when it was introduced in Dec 2020, which had been praised by OFSTED and what were the plans for future delivery of learning?

The SBC Group Manager advised that the main challenge faced by students was 'online fatigue' as most were obliged to undertake many aspects of their lives online e.g. work, socialising and study. However, many learners had valued the online learning as a means of overcoming isolation. The team had worked closely with colleagues to move to the hybrid learning model in early 2021.

The SBC Interim Manager stated that learners had shared that they valued online learning, though some learners had experienced issues regarding access to equipment with some of them sharing laptops and computers with their children. Other learners had left their courses due to mental health concerns and a lack of resources, while others had begun using their mobile phones to access learning. However, they had found it difficult to upload their coursework via their mobiles. Following a safeguarding assessment there had been a phased return to face to face classes. On the whole, higher level

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classes were better suited to online delivery. Courses were being delivered in accessible venues such as the Curve, Chalvey, Riverside and libraries. The future delivery model would remain hybrid. Recently the service had introduced a laptop loan scheme which was available to all learners on request.

- Were most residents aware of these learning opportunities?

The SBC Interim Manager stated that these were publicised through a learner guide, flyers and information on the Council's website. Her team also attended stakeholder meetings with bodies such as the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and community organisations. Footfall at the learning centres had increased recently and recently the customer service team had been on site to provide information while classes had been taking place at the Curve.

- Was there a follow up process once learners had completed their courses?

The SBC Interim Manager advised that learners would be followed up three months after completing a course through destination and learner surveys. She undertook to share this information with Members after the meeting.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

### 26. **Priority Three: Strong Healthy & Attractive Neighbourhoods**

The SBC Group Manager Localities & Neighbourhoods presented an update report regarding Priority Three: Strong Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods.

Members asked the following questions and received the responses below:

- What was the scope of the pilot scheme aimed at reducing health inequalities, when would it be completed?

The SBC Group Manager advised that her team were working with the PCNs (Primary Care Networks) to agree the focus of the project and create a clear twelve month action plan with transparent targets. The project would begin in April 2022 and run for a year. She undertook to report back to a future meeting of the Panel.

- What had been the format of the consultation – i.e., had it been door to door and what had been the response rate?

The SBC Group Manager stated that the surveys had been carried out slightly differently in each of the localities, however, all localities had door to door delivery of surveys which had been publicised at community and resident meetings. Her team had also worked with partners to ensure optimum engagement. She undertook to provide figures regarding the number of surveys delivered and the response rate after the meeting.

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A Member stated that in his view the door to door option would ensure better engagement by residents and this option should continue to be used in the future.

- How was the progress of health inequalities being measured? Was there any data from local GPs regarding this?

The SBC Group Manager stated that advice was being sought from health colleagues, and work was underway to develop clear outcomes and milestones to identify which health interventions had been the most effective. PCNs may ask the community development officers to work with particular cohorts of patients. Other PCNs may be working to the locality model and take a bespoke approach in different localities. She confirmed that data protection legislation would be followed in all instances.

- Was there a Ward breakdown in terms of the main health issues experienced by residents?

The SBC Group Manager advised Ward outlines on the Council's website provided health inequalities data. She undertook to provide links to these pages after the meeting. She explained that PCNs weren't specific to Wards and may cross a number of Ward boundaries.

- How likely was it that the funding would continue to be available for the two community development officers in the future?

The SBC Group Manager advised that Frimley colleagues were keen to maintain links between the two projects and they would be reviewed on a quarterly basis. However, there was a potential risk in that funding may not continue after a year. If that were the case, then the two posts would need to be funded from general fund. She added that the service would not be in a position to deliver to same current standard without the two officers.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

### 27. Library Service Consultation Results

The SBC Group Manager Localities & Neighbourhoods presented a report regarding the Slough Library Service Plan and new delivery model.

Members made the following comments and asked the following questions, which were responded to accordingly:

- The service plan confirmed the need to keep individual libraries open otherwise the service would struggle to deliver the aims set out.

The SBC Group Manager advised that officer recommendations regarding the library service would be set out in the forthcoming Cabinet report. Currently, there were no plans to close any libraries, however, alternative ways of

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delivering the service were being explored in order to make the service more accessible. For example, 70% of all lending was from the children's library and alternatives such as providing this service in school locations, or at the leisure centre would be considered.

- There was a need for a library in Langley. Officers should consider the localities model to ensure accessibility to libraries for all residents.

The SBC Group Manager undertook to incorporate this suggestion in the Cabinet report.

- The report suggested that the savings target for 2022/23 was £400k and further savings may need to be made in subsequent years. How would it be possible to make further savings?

This was a challenge faced by every service area at the Council. Decisions would be based on best value, consideration of other venues and locations for library provision, the increased use of volunteers, partnership working, and increased local provision. Evaluation of the information collated from the Eqia (equalities impact assessment), the needs assessment and the consultation results had indicated that the proposed saving of £400k would still allow the Council to continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

- Large numbers of libraries across the country had been closed due to spending cuts, however, Slough had kept its libraries open. The consultation results revealed that residents wanted to retain libraries. Libraries were often social and learning hubs that catered to community groups and community events. Would these groups lose this access if library provision moved to other sites?

The SBC Group Manager advised that this would be decided on a case by case basis, nevertheless, library provision at any potential new locations would continue to offer book borrowing, community events and any other informal provision would continue.

- It should be noted that schools were not ideal locations for library provision as their buildings were not open at weekends.

The SBC Group Manager stated that the use of schools was just one of many possible options under consideration, any final decision would ensure that the Council continued to fulfil the terms of the 1964 libraries act i.e. ensuring the provision of an efficient and comprehensive service.

- The library service should consider organising book clubs in different languages in partnership with community groups.

The SBC Group Manager said that the suggestion was noted and would be explored further.

- How would it be possible to make further savings in future years?

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The SBC Director advised that due to the current financial crisis faced by the Council it would be necessary to make savings every year for the next five years. Currently, there was no set savings figure for each service area. In 2022/23, the library service was predicted to make the proposed savings without having to close any libraries. The Council needed to make savings of £20M each year for the next five years. Service provision and savings targets would be reassessed annually. It was not therefore possible to predict what would happen in future years. The consultation had provided detailed information regarding residents' views. There were plans to make library users more aware of the online and home service offers. His team were focussed on the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service and using different methods to achieve those outcomes, whilst continuing to make savings.

- The report did not provide any figures or quantitative data regarding the recommendations that would be submitted to Cabinet the following week.

The SBC Director advised that the Cabinet report was being completed and would include feedback from the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel. The report would also be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel following Cabinet approval.

- Would it be possible to continue to make savings in the library service in future years without resorting to the closure of libraries?

The SBC Director advised that this was difficult to predict. The Council needed to sell its assets whilst balancing that with service provision. The valuation of the Council's portfolio of properties had begun and a strategy was being formulated which would inform decisions regarding savings in future years. The co-location of multiple services at the same venue was under investigation. It was important to make the distinction between the library service and individual library buildings. Slough was proud of its well-placed and award winning library service.

- Could local artists showcase their work at Slough libraries?

The SBC Group Manager stated that similar suggestions had been received as part of the consultation and would be explored further.

- Would the Unison response be available to Cabinet?

The SBC Group Manager stated that all consultation responses would be included in the Cabinet report.

- Had the Council sent a response to the queries in the Unison letter?  
Would it be possible to share that with the Panel?

The SBC Director stated that this would be looked into once Cabinet had made its decision. Agreement would need to be sought from Unison first.

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- Some consultees had requested a Police desk at Langley library.

The SBC Group Manager advised that this would be explored once Cabinet had made its decision. Sharing library space with partner organisation would also be considered.

- The report mentioned the deletion and creation of some posts and changing job descriptions in the library service.

The SBC Group Manager stated that some posts were no longer needed and other new posts needed to be implemented. The changes to job descriptions related to which library sites staff would work at. The aim was to create a more flexible service whereby staff would be expected to work at different library sites in the future.

- Why were volunteers being used at libraries?

The SBC Group Manager explained that volunteers were only called upon to assist library staff to deliver enhanced services or events. Many consultees had indicated that they wished to support the library service through volunteering.

The SBC Director stated that going forward there would be fewer library staff and volunteers would only be deployed to assist professionally trained library staff, for example, with events or the home service and the online service, both of which were currently not well used.

- What could residents expect from libraries by 2027? How would adults access the library service if it was located at schools?

The SBC Director stated that residents generally preferred to go to a library that was within walking distance. If, in the future, more residents took up the online or home service offer then the nature of library service provision may need to be reassessed.

The SBC Group Manager stated that providing library services at schools was just one of many options under consideration and the Council would ensure that any future provision was accessible to the greatest number of its residents.

- Recent Cipfa data showed Slough was spending more on library services than other authorities.

The SBC Group Manager advised that to date the Council had delivered an excellent library service. In order to maintain this, officers may look at good practice at other authorities which had a lower per capita spend. Changes to the service may mean that wait times may increase. Currently libraries received a discount on the purchase of hardbacks, but there was no discount

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for e-books or virtual books. Additional savings may be possible in the future as market costs reduced.

The SBC Director Cipfa groupings were a good barometer to assess whether Slough had a comprehensive and efficient library service.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

### **28. Forward Work Programme**

**Resolved:** That the work programme be noted and that a report regarding the call centre statistics be submitted at the April meeting of the Panel.

### **29. Members' Attendance Record**

**Resolved:** That the Members' attendance record be noted.

### **30. Date of Next Meeting - 6 April 2022**

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.08 pm)