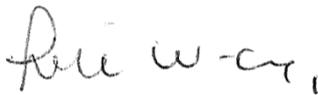


Date of issue: Tuesday, 4th January 2022

MEETING	PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL (Councillors Mohammad (Chair), Strutton (Vice Chair), Bal, A Cheema, H Cheema, R Davis, Gill, Grewal and Minhas.
DATE AND TIME:	WEDNESDAY, 12TH JANUARY, 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NICHOLAS PONTONE 07749 709868

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



JOSIE WRAGG
Chief Executive

AGENDA

PART I

AGENDA ITEM	REPORT TITLE	PAGE	WARD
	Apologies for absence.		
1.	Declarations of Interest	-	-
	<i>All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.</i>		
	CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS		
2.	Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th September 2021 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 1st December 2021	1 - 20	-

AGENDA ITEM	REPORT TITLE	PAGE	WARD
3.	Member Questions <i>(An opportunity for panel members to ask questions of the relevant Director/Associate Director, relating to pertinent, topical issues affecting their Directorate – maximum 10 minutes allocated.)</i>	-	-

SCRUTINY ISSUES

4.	Place Directorate Budget Proposals 2022/23	21 - 32	All
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ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5.	Forward Work Programme	33 - 36	-
6.	Members' Attendance Record	37 - 38	-
7.	Date of Next Meeting - 24th February 2022	-	-

Press and Public

Attendance and accessibility: You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before any items in the Part II agenda are considered. For those hard of hearing an Induction Loop System is available in the Council Chamber.

Webcasting and recording: The public part of the meeting will be filmed by the Council for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The footage will remain on our website for 12 months. A copy of the recording will also be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy. By entering the meeting room and using the public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings.

In addition, the law allows members of the public to take photographs, film, audio-record or tweet the proceedings at public meetings. Anyone proposing to do so is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non hand held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.

Emergency procedures: The fire alarm is a continuous siren. If the alarm sounds immediately vacate the premises by the nearest available exit at either the front or rear of the Chamber and proceed to the assembly point: The pavement of the service road outside of Westminster House, 31 Windsor Road.

Covid-19: To accommodate social distancing there is significantly restricted capacity of the Council Chamber and places for the public are very limited. We would encourage those wishing to observe the meeting to view the live stream. Any members of the public who do wish to attend in person should be encouraged to contact the Democratic Services Officer before the meeting.

Place Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 28th September, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Mohammad (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bal, A Cheema, H Cheema, R Davis, Gill and Grewal

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ali

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Minhas

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the Meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel held on 21st April 2021

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel held on 24 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3. Member Questions

None received.

4. Bus Service Improvement Plan

The SBC Principal Transport Strategy Officer presented a report which set out the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which had been created in partnership between the Council and the bus operators of registered local services in Slough, and the new Enhanced Partnership with the operators (EP).

He advised that the Plan was a living document and that there was the opportunity to both comment on and propose amendments to it, adding that it would be reviewed following analysis of consultation results and comments from both Cabinet and Scrutiny and subsequent discussions with the bus operators. The final version of the Plan would be submitted to the Department for Transport on 31 October 2021.

Panel Members made the following comments and asked the questions below which were responded to by officers as set out:

A Member stated that in the past, bus operators had declined to cover some areas of Slough despite requests from the Council. He asked whether the partnership would ensure that operators would be more responsive to residents' requests for bus services in particular areas. With regard to plans to reduce fares, in his experience, lower fares attracted lower government

subsidies. How, therefore would it be possible to persuade bus operators to lower their fares?

The Transport Lead responded that the introduction of bus priority measures which would lead to a reduction in congestion would result in lower operating costs for the operators and the Council could then negotiate a reduction in fares. However, the Council would be required to subsidise those routes considered not to be commercially viable by the operators, because the need for these would be based on resident demand and fulfilling a social need. However, any subsidy would need to be balanced against current spending protocols related to the Section 114 notice. She added that the operators were willing to join the enhanced partnership, but it was important to note that the bus industry nationally was in decline. Central Government had indicated its willingness to invest in them to ensure their continuity and currently the Council was in good position to negotiate a reduction in fares on behalf of residents.

The SBC Principal Transport Strategy Officer advised that the Council, in its role as the local traffic authority, had no power to compel operators to provide specific services. The operators were commercial entities, and were driven by commercial interests. However, the BSIP would allow both parties to work in partnership and enter negotiations. For example, the Council could undertake highways improvement and the operators could implement others measures. Central Government expected both operators and local authorities to contribute to the BSIP process and policy formulation, the details of which were yet to be finalised.

A Member stated that in the past bus operators had turned down requests to provide a service to Wexham Park Hospital from a particular road, and in his view, operators should be willing to take on board the Council's requests for additional bus routes.

The Transport Lead stated that the above comments were noted, adding that operators were now more willing to engage in negotiations and recognized the new opportunities that the BSIP would afford them.

A Member stated that the outcomes listed in the report stated that there would be an improvement in air quality due to a reduction in CO2 emissions, however, no figures regarding these had been included in the report. In his view, these should be included because detailed figures regarding emissions and air quality would strengthen the Council's case.

The Transport Lead advised that she would need to consult colleagues in the Environment team regarding the matter as there were a number of different measurement methods involved. She added that figures regarding emissions could be included in the report because diffusion units had been installed along bus routes.

A Member asked about outcome 4 listed in the report - the provision of high quality transport links to both existing and new areas of housing development.

He stated that following the completion of the Kings Reach development, a proposal to install a bus stop there had been agreed, however, to date none had been installed.

The Transport Lead advised that she was not familiar with the proposal in question. It may be that a section 106 agreement relating to the development was in place which meant funding for the bus stop would be available. She undertook to look into the matter and report back to the Panel. She added that, to date, no funding had been identified by the Government for the BSIP. If, in the future, the Council could demonstrate it could provide match funding for the installation of bus stops or for example s.106 funding was available then the Council would be able to access DfT (Department for Transport) funds.

A Member asked whether the agreement with the operators was conditional on funding being secured? What would happen if funding could not be secured and how would that impact the viability of the BSIP?

The Principal Transport Strategy Officer advised that the majority of funding had not yet been identified. The Government had identified a pool of £3bn in funding for the BSIP nationally for the lifetime of the national bus strategy. Local authorities had been invited to bid for funding as part of the more scheme specific plan, namely the BSIP enhanced Partnership Plan when the Government would consider funding bids from local authorities. There would be an initial funding allocation as part of the BSIP, however, no figures had been provided. If no monies were forthcoming from these, the partnership would still continue and other funding streams would be explored.

A Member stated that the TfL weekly cap figures quoted in the report were inaccurate and should be amended. An Transport Lead undertook to review and amend these.

A Member stated that if the Council requested a reduction in fares then the financial implications of this should be included in report. The report was lacking in TfL data even though comprehensive data was available on the TfL buses app. He also could not easily find information regarding single journey fares, which needed to be emphasised in report. Most buses only offered a one day pass and single journey fares were not currently available to passengers. The report omitted to state that single journey fares should be available in the future. With regard to bus service outcomes, the report stated that traffic congestion in some areas was largely due to traffic to and from industrial estates, but it was worth emphasising that the daily school run in Langley and other areas also contributed to traffic congestion. He asked why the Council contributed approximately £177,247 to bus routes 4, 5 & 6.

He added that with regard to bus journey times, the report stated that the introduction of bus priority lanes would reduce journey times by two minutes, whereas the tap in and out system would save two and a half minutes. The latter measure may prove more cost effective than implementing bus priority lanes (as these would need to be enforced).

The SBC Principal Transport and Strategy officer advised that currently there was no intention to commit to any further subsidies on any routes. He could not at this stage provide figures regarding any potential subsidies as much depended on the final form of the partnership. The Council had been in discussions with TfL and his comment regarding single journey fares would be discussed. As for reducing bus journey times, the cumulative effect of implementing both highways measures and a tap in and out system would be the best overall solution. The Council contributed approximately £177,247 towards those routes deemed not to be commercially viable by the bus operators. He added that all the Members' comments and suggestions had been noted.

A Member stated that the report contained several omissions, for example, there was little information about the tap in and out system or about the removal of bus lay-bys which contributed to traffic congestion. If the Council wanted to reduce congestion then bus journey times needed to improve drastically to offset the increased pollution as a result of introducing bus lanes. The closure of public toilets and specifically disabled toilets and baby changing facilities at the bus station had been a long standing issue and he could confirm that these were still closed. Supporting facilities and amenities were a crucial part of passenger engagement and experience and he asked whether relevant local partners and the assets team had been consulted.

Transport officers stated that they had been unaware of the situation regarding the closure of toilets at the bus station and undertook to look into the matter.

A Member stated that following the implementation of bus lanes, data regarding improvements in air quality along main routes had been gathered but that this data had not been included in the report. The report also discussed improving passenger satisfaction and participation, however, journey times and cost were an issue for passengers. He also noted that additional bus lanes were proposed and asked whether the relevant local Ward Councillors had been consulted about the matter?

The Transport Lead advised that the consultant who had prepared the bus network was familiar with issues regarding networks but may be less familiar with local issues. He would welcome the opportunity to speak to Ward Councillors. Bus station facilities had been deemed to be outside the scope of the review in terms of being able to action any issues there. The Transport Lead undertook to investigate the closure of public toilets at the bus station with view to rectifying the situation.

The Member asked why bus station facilities had been deemed to be outside the scope of the review. Resident and commuter engagement would only be possible if there were supporting facilities. The Council should be in a stronger position to re-negotiate its agreement with the provider of the bus station. He added that the some areas of the bus station did not provide proper egress and access for wheelchair users and double buggies. A transport review had

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been undertaken just before the covid outbreak regarding bus stop accessibility. In his view, the funding application should include the outcomes of this review. Furthermore, buses were lacking in safety harnesses for securing wheelchairs and buses should be legally compliant. He also called for improved journey times and accurate live bus journey information.

The Transport Lead stated that she welcomed his comments and that all the above points were valid. Officers would include all his suggestions into the BSIP, but he should note that there was no guarantee that they would be delivered as there was currently no funding available. The issue of closed toilets at the bus station would be dealt with immediately.

A Member asked which partners had been consulted as part of the review?

The Transport Lead advised that an online consultation targeted at bus users and non-users had received 300 responses to date. With regard to partners, her team were working mainly with bus operators and had had discussions with neighbouring authorities. Consultation with relevant local partners would take place later on in the process once the Government provided more information regarding the BSIP.

The Member responded that some of these issues had been promised in previous transport plans and were included in the Council's strategic transport plans. For example, smaller buses had been trialled on some of the less commercially viable routes. He asked why these were missing from the report.

The Transport Lead replied that any implementation of demand responsive transport would have been focussed on reasons of economic growth eg getting residents to work rather than social need. However, if such a scheme for smaller buses had been piloted before, then this could be extended out and trialled elsewhere.

The Member responded that the trials had targeted areas with older communities and pockets of deprivation and had not been based on economic growth. In his view, the Council had a duty to its residents and their needs were being overlooked.

The SBC Principal Transport Strategy Officer stated that with regard to an earlier question about timescales for formulating the BSIP, his team had been aware of it since March 2021, however, national Government guidance had only been made available in July 2021 with the Government indicating its intention to issue further guidance and information in September 2021. His team had been actively working on the report since May/June 2021 within the constraints of extremely tight timelines, with the submission date being end of October. This, along with capacity issues in the team was the cause for some of the omissions in the report raised by Members. His team had been obliged to follow timetables in submitting the report to both Cabinet and the scrutiny panel. He confirmed that there would be further detailed engagement with community and partner groups. He concluded by saying that he welcomed

all the comments and suggestions made by Members at the meeting and that many of these would be incorporated into the final version of the BSIP.

As for carbon emissions, both the BSIP and the Council's Local Transport Plan would have to be aligned with its Carbon Strategy and measures would be implemented to achieve targets set in the Strategy. He confirmed that the implementation of safety measures for wheelchairs on buses would be included in the BSIP.

A Member stated that some of the suggestions made by Members at the meeting had previously been agreed at various transport working groups.

A Member asked about bus services connecting Slough to Heathrow airport.

The Transport Lead explained that the services to Heathrow had declined due to the Heathrow expansion project and the impact of covid. Transport officers were working with Heathrow colleagues to improve transport to and from the airport, however, the Council alone was not able to increase bus services to Heathrow.

Following a suggestion from a Member, the Transport Lead advised that route he would look into whether bus 459 to Iwer through Slough could be part of a trial, and he would report this back to the Panel.

A Member speaking under Rule 30 stated that analysis in the report suggested fares in Slough were significantly higher than in neighbouring towns. He asked how this would be tackled. He added that currently there were no zero emissions buses in the fleet, there was currently no bus service from the bus station to Wexham Park Hospital covering the Uxbridge road area. He asked if the operators could be requested to consider implementing a route there.

The Transport Lead replied that all of the above issues were connected to commercial viability and operators' commercial interests. The Council was committed to working with operators as part of the overall plan and reiterated that there were no plans to subsidise routes. Nevertheless, the Council would continue to negotiate and work in partnership with operators.

He added that it was not commercially viable for operators to change their current fleet to zero emission buses, however, they had stated an intention to do so in the next few years. With regard to the comment about a bus service to the hospital, he undertook to look into the matter.

A Member stated that the Council received significant revenue from parking charges. She asked whether the increase in bus use and corresponding decrease in car use would impact on parking revenue.

The Transport Lead responded that it was important to strike a balance between the two. If modal shift, decarbonisation objectives and improved pedestrian and road safety could be achieved then the implications of fewer

car journeys and improvements to air quality would need to be weighed against lost parking revenue and this data would need to be analysed.

Resolved: That the report be noted

5. Slough Local Plan - Proposed Consultation on the Release of Green Belt Sites for Family Housing

The SBC Planning Policy Manager presented a report that set out the Slough Local Plan – proposed consultation on the release of green belt sites for family housing. He advised that appendix 1 of the report set out the basis for the proposed consultation document. The final form of the consultation was yet to be decided and therefore extensive delegated powers for officers had been agreed. The report had been agreed at the Cabinet meeting of 21 September 2021. He concluded by saying that Members would have the opportunity to comment on the proposals and input into the process.

A Member expressed concerns about the possible effects of additional building works on the Wexham Hospital nursing accommodation, on its A&E services, staff recruitment and on health service delivery generally and asked whether any of this had been assessed. With regard to other proposed sites, in his view, environmental and ecological impact assessments should take place at the right time.

The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that the Wexham Hospital site was being promoted by the Hospital and not the Council. Further assessments would take place during the consultation phase and environmental and ecological assessments would be done at the right time in the proper way.

A Member asked how the traffic light system of assessing each site been drawn up. The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that no technical work had been carried out to date. Each site had been assessed at the broad policy level and the sites were being recommended on policy grounds and strategic gaps and took into account any loss of open space or possible impacts on the historic park and gardens.

A Member asked whether high density housing was being proposed. The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that the proposed sites on the green belt could only be released as part of the Local Plan Process, which meant the proposed sites would be examined by a planning inspector and that it would be necessary to specify that they would only be developed for houses. Therefore, it would not be possible for developers to submit plans for high density developments. The sites would comprise family housing, a high proportion of which would be affordable housing.

A Member asked about the consultation process, and asked that if for example 80% of consultees were against a particular development, whether that proposed development would still go ahead.

The SBC Planning Policy Manager explained that a planning related consultation was not a referendum or a vote, and it would depend on the reasons for the objections and that these would need to be related to planning issues rather than say something like loss of views. The results of any consultation would influence the decision-makers.

A Member stated that it was his understanding that developing the green belt should be a last resort measure. The SBC Planning Policy Manager confirmed that use of the green belt was the last resort. He added that whereas nine thousand flats had been identified around the square mile around the Town Centre and other brownfield sites, there still remained a shortage of five thousand houses. Because of the cost and nature of the high rise brownfield developments in the Town Centre, it was not possible to develop family housing there. It would be possible to provide good quality, affordable family housing greenfield sites which were also located on the Green Belt. Both the Government and the Council wanted to optimise brownfield sites whilst maintaining existing suburbs and striking a balance between the two.

A Member asked about the submission of representations and asked whether residents could ask their Ward Councillors to represent them.

The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that residents were free to consult their Ward Councillors, however, the Local Plan process required residents to make formal representations individually.

Following a question from a Member, the SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that the green and amber sites could accommodate up to 700 dwellings, others would have up to 30. He emphasised that no targets had yet been set and no final decision had been made regarding the number of dwellings because detailed planning and assessments were yet to be undertaken.

A Member asked whether the area of unused land on the Bath Road in Taplow (just before the railway bridge) had been considered for development. The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that this was horticultural land though not situated in Slough, it could be considered as part of the wider Growth Area Study in collaboration with Windsor and Maidenhead Councils (and formerly with Buckinghamshire County Council).

A Member asked whether it would be possible to bid for the land where the Muddy Lane sports centre was located – could it be taken out of the green belt. The SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that it had been possible to give planning permission for the sports centre as its use was ancillary. He added that if, in the future, it could be shown that activity on an area of green belt land was being used for an ancillary activity then it could be approved as an exception to the Green belt policy without having to be removed from the green belt.

A Member asked whether all the suitable sites would be developed. The SBC Planning Policy Manager replied this had yet to be decided and that all suitable sites were currently under consideration.

Following a question from a Member, the SBC Planning Policy Manager advised that the Council would impress on developers that their proposals should be for family houses, though these may not all be detached houses and the dimensions and proportions of which had not yet been decided.

A Member asked whether this would include affordable housing. The SBC Planning Policy Manager confirmed that in accordance with the Council's policies there would be a requirement that 35-40% should be affordable homes. He concluded by saying that the advantage of releasing green field sites was that developers would not be able to claim that the sites were not viable for affordable housing.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6. Asset Disposal Update

The SBC Associate Director Place, Strategy and Infrastructure presented a report setting out the Council's Asset Disposal Strategy Programme which was initially presented to Cabinet on 21 June 2021. Since that date the Programme had grown due to the need to dispose of significant Council assets. Cabinet had agreed the Recovery and Renewal Plan and the Asset Disposal Strategy Programme was a key element of this Plan. Cabinet had then referred the decision to Council.

The Cabinet decision was as follows:

- 1) Officers conduct a procurement exercise in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, to obtain the support of external organisations that can assist the Council with a programme of asset disposals to generate capital receipts.
- 2) Cabinet was also requested to agree that:
Income generated from asset disposals will be used in the first instance to finance any Capitalisation Directions received from the Government, and that Additional sale proceeds thereafter will be used to repay existing external debt.

Following a question from a Member, the SBC Associate Director advised that no assets had yet been sold. His team were in the process of undertaking early valuations of non-controversial assets valued at under £1M as part of an initial contribution to the programme. The larger assets valued up to £600M would take longer to finalise. The S.151 officer was assessing if there were any assets that could be disposed of before Christmas 2021 as this would boost the Council's cash reserves. He confirmed that although some firm

offers had been received for the five properties which were on the market, none had yet been sold.

A Member stated that it was his understanding that some apartments had been sold as part of an ongoing programme of sales. He stated that, for each asset sold, he would expect to see a report setting out its valuation, where it was advertised, details of agency fees, the final sale price, and an attached value for money statement.

The Associate Director confirmed that all of the above information would be provided. In terms of achieving best value, the Council had taken a pragmatic approach, and allowed timelines to be flexible as this would ensure best value. He added that it would be commercially advantageous to procure a commercial partner to work with the Council on this and this would ensure best value for all disposals.

A Member asked whether the assets of limited companies would be listed separately. He added that he expected Nova House to make a loss, however, he expected the Council's other rental properties to achieve market value and make a profit.

The SBC Associate Director advised that some of the early reviews undertaken by the MHCLG had highlighted governance issues at the Council relating to the operation of its committees and its commercial arrangements. The review of the asset holdings of those companies was a core part of the Programme. There would be options for disposing of all assets in their entirety or selling them separately.

A Member asked whether anything valued at over £1m would be subject to Cabinet approval and anything less than that figure had been delegated to officers. In his view, all sales should be subject to Cabinet approval.

The SBC Associate Director responded that as the number of assets exceeded 600 in number, referring each sale to Cabinet would be time consuming. He added that Cabinet had already reached a compromise decision regarding the means for approving the disposal of assets and had agreed that the relevant Executive Director, the S.151 officer and the relevant lead Member make the decision and this would ensure political oversight and provide assurance.

A Member asked where the five properties had been advertised with the same agent. How would best value be ensured. How far had the analysis progressed? Would any properties be auctioned?

The Associate Director advised that the properties were being marketed by a number of different agents. He added that there was an in-house assets team, who had in the past been focussed on regeneration and acquisitions and had since moved from acquiring assets to their disposal. There was also a team that specialised in commercial negotiations with agents in the property market to ensure best value. However, the team were limited in what they

could achieve in terms of disposing of small focussed group of assets. Meanwhile a procurement exercise was underway to secure a partner to deal with the larger assets. He concluded by saying that his team were well placed in terms of local knowledge and experience of the Slough property market, but they were working at full capacity hence the need to bring in external expertise.

He added that given the number of the assets, their disparate nature and the level of returns the Council needed to achieve, it would not be possible to prioritise the disposal of assets until an option appraisal and prioritisation had been undertaken for each asset. Auctioning the properties had not been discounted as an option. A broad range of options would be recommended.

Following a question from a Member, the Associate Director stated that the table in the report set out the estimated value of all the Council's assets, nearly half of which were made up of HRA (housing revenue accounts) assets and these had a range of conditions attached to them. This would be explored as an option, however, tenants would have to agree to any transfer of ownership. Some assets had planning conditions attached to them. The Council may opt to remove some of those conditions to ensure best value. He added that some buyers would be more risk averse than others. For example, registered housing providers and housing associations would likely be more risk-averse. He assured the Panel that any disposal would be subject to pre-scrutiny before any commercial decision was made.

A Member asked whether the Council had a policy of not selling all these assets to single buyer. The Associate Director stated that he was not aware of any such policy but he would consult commercial experts in his team. In any case, in his view, it was unlikely that a single buyer would bid to buy large numbers or all of the assets.

Councillor Bal proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Strutton:

I agree with the Cabinet Recommendation of option 2. I further recommend that Cabinet:

- A. Lists out all current assets proposed for disposal together with independent values, in part 2 of the Cabinet meeting.
- B. Advertising assets for disposal locally and nationally in established industry print and online platforms. Once the final offer is received, that it is clearly advertised to ensure no better offer is missed out.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Forward Work Programme

The forward work programme was noted.

8. Date of Next Meeting - 8th November 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 29 September 2021 at 5pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.52 pm)

Place Scrutiny Panel – Extraordinary Meeting held on Wednesday, 1st December, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Mohammad (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bal, A Cheema, H Cheema, R Davis, Gill, Grewal and Minhas

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Mann, Matloob, Sharif, Swindlehurst, Gahir and Hulme

Apologies for Absence:- None

PART 1

9. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bal declared that his daughter worked for Slough Borough Council and that in relation to Minute 11 – A4 Experimental Bus and Cycle Lane that he was a taxi driver. Having declared the interest, Councillor Bal remained in the meeting and participated in the discussion on this item.

10. Initial Budget Proposals 2022/23 - Place

The Executive Director of Place & Community gave a presentation on the in-year budget position for 2021/22 and initial savings proposals for 2022/23 in what was formerly the Place Directorate. It was noted that from 1st October 2021 a new Place & Community directorate had been established with Community services joining the Place directorate. Customer services had become part of Corporate Resources. The presentation related to services in the former Place directorate with scrutiny of community services being undertaken by the Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel.

Further work would be carried out over the next month to refine the 2022/23 budget proposals with an update to come back to the Panel in January 2022.

The 2021/22 savings assigned to Place were on track to be delivered and included £3.2m savings from the Our Futures restructure and £645,000 from cross-cutting corporate savings allocation. There were also a series of income generation activities noted including rent from the Moxy Hotel (£179,000); bus shelter advertising (£75,000); additional parking income (£208,000); and increased weighbridge and bulky waste collection charges (£98,000).

The savings target for Place & Community in 2022/23 was £5.75m from a net budget in 2021/22 of £9.75m. The net budget for 2022/23 would therefore be reduced to £4m and the savings proposals were outlined. The proposals included income from the Moxy Hotel (£821,000), digital street advertising, the new parking contract, increase in charges for waste services (£132,000), street cleansing service reductions (£400,000), grounds maintenance service reductions (£450,000), allotments (£20,000) and removing the subsidy for the

bus station (£42,000). There would also be a further directorate restructure which aimed to save £1.1m from the General Fund, and £2.4m overall, and further detail would be provided to the Panel at its meeting in January. Members noted the key pressures and risks relating to the savings programme and had had the opportunity to review the detailed business cases and equality impact assessments.

The Panel asked a number of detailed questions and raised queries about various proposals which are summarised as follows:

- *What were the income projections from Moxy Hotel investment?* The hotel development had been completed ahead of schedule and occupancy was high. The contract fixed the income returns to the Council for the first three years rising from £179,000, to £1m then £1.5m followed by index link increases.
- *What would be level of service reduction from the savings from grass and hedge cutting?* The proposal for grass cutting was to reduce the current level of 15 cuts with a cylindrical mower to circa 10 cuts with a flail cutter. Hedge cutting would depend on the location with priority given to cutting hedges where they obscured sight lines from the highway or caused an obstruction. A Member highlighted some of the operational issues involved in a move from rotary to flail cutting, which the Director recognised and confirmed that the changes would require detailed consideration prior to being implemented.
- *What were the reductions in play equipment?* It was possible that some play equipment would be removed if the cost of repair was too high. This saving applied to equipment maintained from the General Fund only not Housing Revenue Account play sites.
- *What was the likelihood of being able to rent out space at Observatory House as had been set out in the original business plan?* The office market had been significantly impacted by Covid-19 but the prospects for renting out space would improve as the economy recovered. It was envisaged that 3 or 4 of the 6 floors of Observatory House could be available for rent, depending on the outcome of the independent evaluation of best consideration for all Council assets due to take place early in 2022. Asked about the cost of external valuations and support, the Director commented that the scale of the asset disposal programme and the specialist skills required meant that external capacity and capability would be justified to ensure best consideration could be achieved.
- *How would the increased income from allotment holders be achieved?* It would be to charge for water usage and the anticipated £20,000 income would recover the costs.
- *What different level of service would be delivered with the £400,000 reduction in the street cleansing budget?* The saving was expected to

Place Scrutiny Panel - 01.12.21

result in a reduced number of operatives and vehicles but that changes to the cleansing regime could minimise the impacts. For example, mobile crews could be deployed rather than fixed barrow beats.

- *Would increased waste disposal charges and reduced staffing levels lead to an increase in fly-tipping?* The Director commented that the evidence was that when prices had risen in the past it had not resulted in increased fly-tipping as it was generally commercial waste that was illegally disposed of rather than bulky household waste.

Members asked about the reasons for the proposed restructure given the Our Futures process that had only just been completed. The reasons included the fact that the current structure of some teams was based on high volumes of regeneration construction which would not now happen; and the fact the Council's financial situation meant that it needed to find the right approach to deliver acceptable levels of core services for the minimum resources. There would be significant savings requirements for several years beyond 2022/23, therefore further restructures were possible, although it was noted that a number of the proposals were to generate more income rather than simply reduce staffing or services. It was also noted that it was essential for the Council's finances that the savings target was achieved and alternative savings would need to be found if the proposed items were changed or could not be delivered.

A Member asked about whether the problem of the closure of the public convenience in the bus station would be addressed. It was responded that it not effected by the proposals as the model since the new bus station opened was for it to be managed by the retail operator.

Councillors Gahir and Matloob raised further issues under Rule 30 which included whether some of the savings could lead to higher costs in the future if service standards were lowered and generate more casework and complaints from residents. The Director responded that there was a balance with all the proposed savings in seeking to provide adequate core services whilst significantly reducing the Council's costs and expenditure. In response to a question from Councillor Gahir about digital advertising it was noted that several initiatives were proposed to increase income and that in this case the Council would not be liable for the maintenance costs and the sites would be subject to planning permission. Lead Members with portfolio responsibilities for services in Place responded to several of the points raised during the course of the discussion.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Panel noted the presentation and that further proposals would come to the next meeting in January 2022.

Resolved –

- (a) That the presentation on the 2021/22 budget position and 2022/23 savings proposals be noted, with the comments of the committee being taken into account as the budget was refined.
- (b) That a further update be provided to the Panel at the next meeting on 12th January 2022.

11. A4 Experimental Bus and Cycle Lane

The Panel considered a report on the experimental A4 bus and cycle lane and was invited to submit comments to Cabinet prior to a decision on any permanent scheme being made. The report was summarised by the Associate Director of Place Strategy and the Lead Member for Sustainable Transport & The Environment responded to a number of questions and comments from members of the Panel during the course of the discussion.

The bus and cycle lane scheme was initially introduced under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) in 2020 to allow for social distancing and to reprioritise road space to for pedestrians and cyclists as outlined in the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund guidance. The scheme initially introduced operated 24 hours in designated sections of the A4 between Dover Road and Uxbridge Road. There were a significant number of objections to the scheme including a petition which received 5,272 signatures. A number of changes to the scheme were made following a review by scrutiny and Cabinet which changed the operating hours to peak time only and enabled a range of authorised vehicles such as Hackney carriages, private hire vehicles and e-scooters to use the bus lane. The proposal was to make the peak time experimental scheme permanent and the report set out the monitoring data, consultation responses and information on issues such as air quality and journey times. The alternative options, including removing the bus and cycle lane, were summarised in the report.

Councillors Gahir, Matloob and Sharif addressed the Panel under Rule 30 and made a number of comments during the course of the discussion.

The Panel asked a number of questions about the monitoring data, including both the practical difficulties of collecting reliable and comparable data due to Covid-19; and whether the data collected supported the recommendation in the report that the bus lane be made permanent. For example, the data showed that average car journey times had increased; whilst air quality in the A4 corridor had improved the evidence could not directly attribute this to the bus lane; the consultation showed a majority of respondents were opposed to the scheme; and there were no evident improvements in public transport services and usage arising from the bus prioritisation. The Lead Member for Sustainable Transport highlighted that the scheme had improved the reliability of bus services and the bus priority measures were an important step as part of a wider strategy to work with bus operators to improve services over time. The Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership with bus

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operators considered by the Panel in September provided the platform for this and more radical measures to promote sustainable transport in other towns and cities across the country were noted, such as ultra-low emission zones. It was stated that the air quality data would require significant recalibration to determine the direct impact of the bus lane, but the evidence clearly showed major improvements in air quality during the period the scheme was in place.

Members raised a number of other issues including the ability of taxi drivers to stop in the bus lane to pick up fares; the ability of electric vehicles to use the bus lane; and the issues caused by the additional traffic movements at Salt Hill Activity Centre which was being used as a temporary vaccination centre for Covid-19. A member also highlighted the need to address localised congestion on the A4 in Colnbrook to improve the reliability of bus services between Heathrow and Slough. Whilst this particular issue was outside of the experimental scheme it highlighted the importance of addressing the wider transport issues in the corridor to make public transport as reliable and attractive as possible to promote modal shift.

Councillor Gill proposed a number of points to recommend to Cabinet which were refined during discussion, seconded and agreed by the Panel. The proposals were designed to ensure the scheme maximised capacity, ensured the bus lane led to improvements in bus services and promoted other modes of sustainable transport. They were that if the scheme was to be made permanent the Council should:

- “Ensure the scheme was part of a broader strategy to improve bus services and public transport provision for Slough residents”;
- “Maximise capacity by using the existing service road as the bus lane where practicable between Huntercombe roundabout and The Three Tuns junction”;
- “Explore localised measures to widen any sections of carriageway where appropriate, to increase capacity to provide the bus lane and relieve traffic congestion, subject to securing external funding.”
- “Standardise the rules and regulations for the operation of all bus lanes across the borough”;
- “Take forward plans to segregate the bus lane from the cycle lane to make cycling as safe and attractive alternative mode as possible”;
- “Recognise that existing public transport provision required significant improvement and therefore work with bus operators through the Enhanced Partnership/Bus Service Improvement Plan to seek to lower fares and improve the frequency and reliability of services both on the A4 and elsewhere in the borough”;
- “Promote the take up of Electric Vehicles by making the bus lane available to use for zero emission vehicles.”

At the conclusion of the discussion the above points were agreed to refer to Cabinet.

Resolved – That the following comments on the A4 bus lane be referred to Cabinet:

That if the A4 bus and cycle lane was to be made permanent the Council should:

1. Ensure the scheme was part of a broader strategy to improve bus services and public transport provision for Slough residents;
2. Maximise capacity by using the existing service road as the bus lane where practicable between Huntercombe roundabout and The Three Tuns junction;
3. Explore localised measures to widen any sections of carriageway where appropriate, to increase capacity to provide the bus lane and relieve traffic congestion, subject to securing external funding.
4. Standardise the rules and regulations for the operation of all bus lanes across the borough;
5. Take forward plans to segregate the bus lane from the cycle lane to make cycling as safe and attractive alternative mode as possible;
6. Recognise that existing public transport provision required significant improvement and therefore work with bus operators through the Enhanced Partnership/Bus Service Improvement Plan to seek to lower fares and improve the frequency and reliability of services both on the A4 and elsewhere in the borough;
7. Promote the take up of Electric Vehicles by making the bus lane available to use for zero emission vehicles.

12. Digital Signage Policy

A report was considered on the Digital Signage Project which had been referred to the Panel by Cabinet at its meeting on 15th November 2021. Digital advertising provided an income generating opportunity for the Council which had been discussed earlier in the meeting during consideration of the 2022/23 Place budget.

The Cabinet had agreed the policy in principle but sought the views of scrutiny, specifically on the type and appropriateness of advertising. It was

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noted that the policy included a provision that the necessary authorities, such as the Advertising Standards Authority, to monitor the type of advertising.

In response to comments from the Panel it was confirmed that planning permission would be required. Members sought assurance that the Council wouldn't be exposed to any maintenance costs and it was confirmed that maintenance would be the responsibility of the provider. The Council would receive a licence fee. One suggestion from a member of the Panel was to seek to explore the possibility of ensuring the Council could maximise its income for advertisement placed in the most commercially advantageous sites and whether advertising income was being maximised from facilities such as Arbour Park. The Leader of the Council and Executive Director would consider this suggestion as part of the delegation to implement the project.

The Panel noted the report and did not make any further specific comments on the policy over and above those from Cabinet.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That no further additions or amendments to the policy be referred back to Cabinet.

13. Date of Next Meeting - 12th January 2022

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed at 12th January 2022 at 6.30pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.45 pm)

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PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL 12 JANUARY 2022

INTRODUCTION

➤ **This presentation:**

- Discusses those Place Directorate savings proposals which have changed since 1 December Scrutiny
- Outlines the Directorate restructure which is key to our overall savings target through a number of different savings plans
- Identifies key risks / pressures

2022/23 SAVINGS

- **Lease renewals and renting floor space** (Cllr Anderson) - £1.380m
 - A number of tenants wish to extend their leases allowing the opportunity for renegotiation at improved terms
 - Rent floor space at Observatory House (meanwhile use)
 - **BOTH** of these are **dependent on the outcome of an independent evaluation of Best Consideration** for all of our assets which is due to take place in January/February 2022

2022/23 SAVINGS

- **Increase in charges for waste services** (Cllr Carter) £132k
 - £17 per item of bulky waste, minimum charge £51 (3 items)
 - £25 / fridge collected
 - Discount of £10 per collection for over 65's and disabled badge holders
 - Weighbridge - general waste from £173.68/tonne to £191.48/tonne
 - Weighbridge - green waste from £76.90/tonne to £89.63/tonne
 - Mattresses – from £15.12 per item to £18.50 per item
 - RBWM £48,

COMPARISON OF BULKY WASTE CHARGES – 2021/22

	Min 3 Items	5 Items	7 Items	Fridge
SBC 2021/22	£30	£50	£70	£20
SBC 2022/23	£51	£85	NA	£25
RBWM 2021/22	£48	£60	NA	£36
Bucks 2021/22	£50	£100	£150	0
Spelthorne	£55	£55	£80	0
Runnymede	£60	£60	£80	0
Bracknell	£46	£55	£59	0
Reading	£50	£66	NA	£48
Hillingdon	£25	£25	NA	£25

COMPARISON OF BULKY WASTE DISCOUNTS

	Min 3 Items
SBC 2021/22	Free if 65+ or in receipt of personal independence payment
SBC 2022/23	£10 discount if receive income related benefit
RBWM 2021/22	Reduced fee if in receipt of income related benefit
Bucks 2021/22	Reduced fee if in receipt of income related benefit
Spelthorne	£10 discount if in receipt of income related benefit
Runnymede	£10 discount if in receipt of income related benefit
Bracknell	50% discount if in receipt of income related benefit
Reading	YRP (Reading Passport) holders 25% discount
Hillingdon	Free if 65+ or in receipt of personal independence payment

2022/23 SAVINGS

- **Street Cleansing Service reductions** (Cllr Carter) - £400k
 - Reduce daily deployment by 11 operatives (from 34 to 23)
 - Reduce by 3 vans and 2 mechanical pavement sweepers
 - Reduce frequency of planned litter pick
 - Fly tipping to be done by response teams rather than a dedicated crew
 - Reduce from 3 to 2 barrow beats in town centre
 - Barrow beats in Langley and in Colnbrook to become part time
 - Increased reliance on area crews and response teams

2022/23 SAVINGS

- **Grounds maintenance service reductions (Cllr Akram) - £450k**
 - Reduce front line deployment by 17 (from 48 to 31)
 - Shrub bed weeding from 7x to 3x (strim and clear where necessary)
 - Edging beds from 7x to 1x
 - Hedge cutting from 3x to 1x
 - Weed spray on highways from 5x to 3x
 - Rose beds – decant good stock into a smaller number of beds
 - Grass cutting from 15x to 10x – flail cut rather than cylinder cut
 - Rough grass cut (meadow cut) from 5x to 3x
 - Bulbs and wild flower meadows – cut and leave to rot and self seed rather than cut, remove and newly seed

2022/23 SAVINGS

Place & Community Directorate restructure

- £1.153m of General Fund savings (£2.4m overall)
- Data being checked for double counting & to confirm funding source
- Must align with capability & capacity review -end February 2022
- Subject to union & staff consultation
- Savings exclude streets & grounds but headcount below, 11 and 17 respectively, includes them

No. Posts	Retain	New	Delete	Total
Place	361	17	85	463
Community	221	0	19	240
Total	582	17	104	703

2022/23 SAVINGS

➤ Directorate restructure continued

Current type of employment	Number
Permanent posts	480
Fixed term contract	12
New posts (not occupied)	17
Vacant posts (not occupied)	99
Vacant posts (occupied by agency staff)	54
As & when posts (zero hours)	38
2 nd job (Saturday Libraries)	3
Total	703

KEY RISKS / PRESSURES 2022/23

- Confidence in underlying accounts (P8 at time of writing)
- Income from lease of properties and rent of floor space will not happen once buildings are sold
- Fluctuating price of diesel, petrol, electricity and gas
- Officer salaries for a number of teams are dependent on high volumes of regeneration construction which will not now happen
- Officer posts supported by income which is no longer attainable need to be deleted but this does not bring savings, it prevents cost pressure
- Further work is required to ensure that the funding source for each post is fully understood

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Place Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 12th January 2022

CONTACT OFFICER: Nick Pontone
Democratic Services Lead
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 875120

WARDS: All

PART I
FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL - WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

1. **Purpose of Report**

For the Place Scrutiny Panel to discuss its work programme for 2021-22.

2. **Recommendations/Proposed Action**

That the Panel review the work programme and potential items listed for inclusion.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3.1 The Place Scrutiny Panel, along with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and other Scrutiny Panels combine to meet the local authority's statutory requirement to provide public transparency and accountability, ensuring the best outcomes for the residents of Slough.

3.2 The effective scrutiny of the council's decision making and work in the area of health and social care underpins the delivery of all four of the Joint Slough Wellbeing Strategy priorities:

- Starting Well
- Integration
- Strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods
- Workplace Health

3.3 The work of the Health Scrutiny Panel also reflects the following priorities of the Five Year Plan:

- Outcome 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful.
- Outcome 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications of proposed action.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications of proposed action.

(c) Human Rights Act and other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no Equalities implications arising from this report.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 This work programme should cover all aspects of the Place Scrutiny Panels remit. The respective areas of responsibility between the Panel's is set out in Appendix B which was approved by Council in May 2021.

5.2 The work programme is a flexible document which will be continually reviewed throughout the municipal year. It will be updated to take into account requests for consideration of issues from members of the Place Scrutiny Panel.

6. **Conclusion**

This report is intended to provide the Place Scrutiny Panel with the opportunity to review its upcoming work programme and make any amendments it feels are required.

7. **Appendices Attached**

A - Work Programme for 2021/22

8. **Background Papers**

None.

PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL
WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022

12 January 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updated Place Directorate budget proposals
24 February 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bus Service Improvement Plan
29 March 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•

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MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2021/22
PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL

COUNCILLOR	<u>28/06/21</u> <u>CANCELLED</u>	<u>09/09/21</u> <u>MOVED TO</u> <u>28/09/21</u>	28/09/21	<u>01/12/21</u> <u>EXTRA-</u> <u>ORDINARY</u>	12/01/22	24/02/22	29/03/22
Mohammad (Chair)			P	P			
Strutton (Vice- Chair)			P	P			
Bal			P	P			
A Cheema			P	P			
H Cheema			P	P			
R Davis			P	P			
Gill			P	P			
Grewal			P	P			
Minhas			Ap	P			

P = Present for whole meeting P* = Present for part of meeting Ap = Apologies given Ab = Absent, no apologies given

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