

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 17th October, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Mann (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Akram, Anderson, Bains, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present:- Councillor Smith

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Hulme

PART 1

44. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

45. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st September 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 21st September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

46. Corporate Debt Management Policy

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that sought approval for a new Corporate Debt Management Policy.

The Council did not currently have a corporate policy in place that would ensure consistent debt management processes across the authority. The policy had been designed to take account of best practice and would be beneficial in achieving the best possible cash flow for the Council whilst ensuring liability was calculated correctly. The Council had a duty to collect debt and take enforcement action where reasonable. The overarching policy would then be supported by procedures and processes for specific types of debt and this approach was supported by Commissioners.

Lead Members noted that the policy would help ensure vulnerable people were assisted in meeting their financial obligations, and it was recognised that this was important as prompt collection avoided higher levels of debt being accumulated. It was therefore in the interests of all parties for the authority to have effective and efficient debt management practices in place along with the appropriate support for residents and businesses who may experience financial difficulties.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet approved the recommendation.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Corporate Debt Management Policy set out in appendix A to the report be approved.
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer) to make minor amendments in consultation with the Lead Member, to allow for the Policy to be updated and to take account of any future service improvements or legislative changes.

47. Update on Procurement & Contract Management

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance updated the Cabinet on improvements to procurement and contract management since the establishment of the commercial team in 2021. The report also updated on the implementation of the Directions issued by the Secretary of State in relation to the procurement and contract management function.

The improvements made since 2021 included a review of the contract procedure rules which had been changed to improve decision making at the appropriate levels; strengthened governance arrangements and training for officers; and more robust processes in the letting of new contracts to ensure it delivered best value. A new centralised contract register had been developed which put the Council in a much stronger position to effectively manage, plan and procure contracts. Progress had been made to put in place a permanent in house team to enable the Council to move away from the expensive consultancy support that had been provided on a temporary basis since 2019. The Cabinet noted that as a result of the reviews of all contracts, savings of £1.8m had been identified.

Lead Members welcomed progress that had been made and the Commissioners comments that in the future they would like to see regular management information on procurement and contract management activities to ensure the highest standards were being met. The Executive Director of Finance & Commercial stated that the future development activities were set out in paragraph 2.11 of the report and this included ensuring key performance indicators were meaningful and monitored effectively with a target date for implementation of January 2023.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the key development activities undertaken by the Commercial team since its establishment to improve procurement and contract management at the council be noted.

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(b) Noted that savings and best value were being driven through detailed review of the council's contracts register.

(c) Noted the further key development activities that would be undertaken by the establishment of an embedded commercial function, to improve the function and deliver the procurement and contract management strategy.

48. Slough Children First Limited (SCF) Annual Report and Governance Review

The Cabinet considered a report that included the Slough Children First Annual Report and an update on a governance review of the company. It was the first annual report since its governance arrangements changed from a standalone trust to a company wholly owned by the Council.

The Director of Operations at Slough Children First gave a presentation that summarised the progress and challenges of the past year as set out in the Annual Report. The Cabinet noted the position regarding the various inspections carried out during the year; the rising demand for services; performance indicators; and the work to stabilise the workforce. Good progress had been highlighted in the inspections of fostering and the Breakaway service, although significant areas of weakness had been identified in the SEND inspection as previously reported to Cabinet.

The work to improve the governance arrangements of the company were discussed, including the work already undertaken which had identified a number of recommendations which it was proposed would form an action plan that was reported to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee every 6 months. SCF had developed a high level 7-year business plan for 2022-29 along with a series of business cases for areas such as early help, edge of care and workforce. The Department for Education had commissioned Mutual Ventures to undertake a review of the business plan and it was proposed that this be presented to the People Scrutiny Panel as part of its review of the business plan in order to make recommendations to Cabinet.

Lead Members discussed the report in detail and asked about engagement with families and how the voice of the child was being heard; the appropriate role of the Lead Member for Children's Service with the company; the effectiveness of the company board; and the workforce plans to tackle the long-standing recruitment difficulties in social care. Officers responded to the points raised. The financial position of the company was discussed and it was recognised that the development of a robust business plan was vital.

The Leader stated that the DfE Commissioner, Trevor Doughty, had left that role at the end of September. He placed on record his thanks to Mr Doughty for his work in Slough and said the Cabinet looked forward to working with the new Commissioner, Paul Moffat.

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The Leader also asked that the thanks of the Cabinet be passed to frontline staff for the support they were given to children in Slough.

Resolved –

- (a) That SCF's Annual Report be noted.
- (b) That the governance review of SCF be noted and in particular the recommended actions and recommend to the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee that it receives six monthly reports on progress against the governance review recommendations.
- (c) Noted that People Scrutiny Panel was receiving a report recommending that it set up a task and finish group to review the Mutual Ventures report, Annual Review process and draft business plan to make recommendations to cabinet on approval of the business plan as part of the budget setting process.

49. Adult Social Care Transformation Programme Update

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report that updated Cabinet on the progress of the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme. Approval was sought to procure external support services from PeopleToo to support the delivery of the programme for a further year to 31st March 2024.

The transformation programme was on track to deliver a savings target of £9.1m between 2021 to 2024, of which £4.8m was expected to be delivered in the current year. The savings were being achieved through a range of adult social care projects and were additional to other savings made by the directorate, which amounted to a total of £14.7m over three years. The Cabinet recognised that there were a number of pressures on the service arising from the implementation of adult social care reform including the new inspection regime; inflationary pressures; and resource challenges. It was agreed that the directorate required appropriate support and expertise from PeopleToo to be able to continue to identify and successfully deliver the savings.

Lead Members sought assurance that the comments of Commissioners relating to the development of internal capacity to deliver change and savings programmes could be put in place in time to contribute to the delivery of the savings targets after 2024. It was important that the right support was in place to support the transformation programme and the contract extension would provide time to develop the in house capacity. The re-establishment of a Programme Management Office was a positive step in that direction.

After due consideration the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the update and progress concerning the ASC Transformation Programme be noted.
- (b) That the procurement of external support from external consultancy People Too be agreed for a one year period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 using direct award to support the delivery of the ASC Transformation Programme.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director for People (Adults), in consultation with the Lead Member for Public Health and Social Care, to have oversight of the procurement and the ASC Transformation Programme and to enter into contract documentation.

50. Health Visiting and School Nursing (0-19 service)

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report that sought approval for a further one-year contract extension for the health visiting and school nursing (0-19) services contract from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024. This would provide officers the time to develop and agree a more integrated, collaborative approach with neighbouring local authorities to commission these services in the future.

A task and finish group had been established to oversee a joint commissioning approach with local partners and it was working to a deadline of February 2023 to assess whether a joint approach would be deliverable, with the option for the Council to develop its own strategy if insufficient progress was being made. Lead Members asked whether it was realistic that there would be sufficient clarity by February to determine whether a joint approach was optimal and it was responded that the timescale was realistic. Questions were asked about the measurement of outcomes and value for money to ensure the investment was driving improvement. Officers provided assurance that this would be a key part of the commissioning activity and that the current contract delivered good outcomes for a place with Slough's demographic profile.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed that the contract for Health Visiting and School Nursing (0-19s) Services be extended for a further year from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 .
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of People (Adults), in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills and Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health to agree the terms of that contract extension and to arrange for the legal agreement to be sealed.

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- (c) Agreed a direction of travel for Slough Borough Council to collaborate on an East Berkshire basis in relation to commissioning of health visiting and school nursing services in the future.
- (d) Noted the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to oversee a joint commissioning approach with local partners with a suggested deadline of February 2023 for assessment of progress. If suitable progress has not been made at this time, the authority will pursue a solo provider selection and commissioning process from 1st April 2023.

51. Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policies - Consultation Feedback

The Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment introduced a report that proposed the approval of revised policies for home to school travel assistance for both age groups 5-16 and post-16. The policies had been subject to an extensive consultation exercise and had been considered by the People Scrutiny Panel. The key consultation and scrutiny feedback was detailed in the report.

The principles of the revised policies were to promote social integration, independence, parental responsibility, collaboration between schools and the promotion of environmentally sustainable travel. The policy changes and responses to the points raised by scrutiny were summarised by the Associate Director for Education & Inclusion. It was noted that the proposed policy changes were estimated to contribute £210,000 of savings towards the service areas savings plan of £550,000 by the end of 2024/25.

Lead Members welcomed the revised policies and carefully considered the consultation feedback. It was noted that the home to school travel assistance for most children would be unchanged under the new policies and that the measures such as independent travel training and a travel bursary option would help families make their own arrangements for their child's attendance at school or college. The Cabinet highlighted the importance of ensuring the safeguarding considerations were taken into account when more independent travel options were being provided.

After due consideration, the Cabinet approved the recommendations.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed the proposed policy changes for Home to School Travel (5-16) with effect from the 2023/24 academic year with transitional arrangements in place for the academic year 2022/23 (Appendix 1).
- (b) Agreed the proposed policy changes for Home to College Travel (Post 16) (Appendix 2) with effect from the 2023/24 academic year with transitional arrangements in place for the academic year 2022/23.

- (c) Delegated authority to Executive Director of People (Children), in consultation with Lead Member for Children Services and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to make minor amendments to the policy, including uprating the contribution charges and bursary levels to take account of inflationary pressures, subject to any changes being within the approved budget.

52. Intelligent Traffic Systems Maintenance Contract

The Lead Member for Transport & the Local Environment introduced a report that sought approval to participate in the procurement exercise for the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Maintenance Contract from May 2023 to April 2033 via a joint procurement exercise led by Reading Borough Council.

The contract included maintenance of infrastructure such as traffic lights, automated traffic counters, CCTV cameras, variable message signs and vehicle activated speed signs. The contract value was expected to be £25m over 10 years split across all the authorities with an estimated annual spend of £500,000 per authority. The option was being recommended as it was considered to be the most cost-effective procurement model that would reduce costs and deliver efficiencies. The five local authorities involved had jointly procured maintenance for ITS equipment since 2010 and had been extended several times.

The Cabinet was supportive of the proposed approach and agreed it was the most cost-effective way to provide access to capacity, skills and supply chains. A number of questions were asked about the operational arrangements in place to ensure a responsive service could be delivered in Slough.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed that Reading Borough Council would lead a joint procurement on behalf of other Berkshire authorities, including Slough Borough Council.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment, to approve the award of the ITS Maintenance Contract to the successful tenderer and to enter into the contract documentation.

53. Mitigation Strategy regarding Burnham Beeches and Upton Court Park masterplan

The Lead Member for Housing & Planning introduced a report about the mitigation for the likely adverse impacts of extra visitors, from Slough residential developments, on the protected site at Burnham Beeches. Developer contributions could fund mitigation in the form of habitat

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enhancements at Upton Court Park in Slough as part of a wider improvement plan.

The Council had a duty under the Habitats Regulations to address the adverse impacts of new residential development on Burnham Beeches and the mitigation strategy could help achieve this by treating Upton Court Park as 'suitable alternative natural green space' and by implementing proposed natural habitat enhancement projects with the aim of attracting visitor that would otherwise have gone to Burnham Beeches. Delivery of the strategy would depend on various factors including developer contributions via Section 106 planning obligations.

The Cabinet welcomed the strategy and agreed that the proposed enhancements at Upton Court Park were an appropriate way to improve habitats at the park and reduce any adverse impacts on Burnham Beeches. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the Mitigation Strategy (re protection of Burnham Beeches) that proposes Upton Court Park be treated as a 'suitable alternative natural greenspace' (SANG) and for natural habitat enhancements in the Park (inclusive of maintenance) to be funded by developer contributions via the planning process.
- (b) Agreed to implement natural habitat enhancements identified in the Mitigation Strategy as soon as practical after mitigation related financial contributions have been received and to maintain those enhancements long term.
- (c) Approved the proposal for the development of an Upton Court Park masterplan to coordinate implementation of various recreation and natural habitat enhancements (inclusive of those referred to in (a) above).

54. Recommendations from Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals: Asset Disposal Strategy

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that contained the recommendations from the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals to approve the Asset Disposal Strategy.

The Committee had met on 13th October to review the proposed strategy in detail. Approving an Asset Disposal Strategy was key part of the Council's wider financial strategy to sell assets in order to obtain capital receipts and reduce debt and borrowing costs. The strategy aimed to make best use of Council property assets and, where identified for disposal, that best consideration was achieved. The strategy had been developed following a detailed review of the Council's asset register and the advisors, Avison

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Young, had prepared an Asset Review report that provided the underpinning data, analysis and structure of the proposed strategy.

The Lead Member explained that a phased approach would be taken, which had commenced with approval by Cabinet in September for the disposal of four out-of-borough assets, and the strategy detailed the approach that would be taken. A clear process underpinned by proper governance and professional advice would be taken with Cabinet taking key decisions for each disposal following consideration by the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals. Appendix 4 to the report was a list of the assets recommended to be declared surplus and progressed towards disposal as they were not operationally required by the Council.

The conclusions of the Cabinet Committee from its meeting on 13th October were summarised. Cabinet was recommended to approve the Asset Disposal Strategy and the list of proposed surplus assets at Appendix 4, with the exception of 2 Victoria Street and 34 Herschel Street. The Committee had asked that the option of bringing these two properties back into use for temporary accommodation be explored with a delegation to declare them surplus following this exercise if appropriate. This was agreed by Cabinet.

The Leader updated on the discussions the Committee had had regarding the Adelphi site and properties at MacKenzie Street. It was agreed these properties could be declared surplus as the Council did not have operational requirements for them. However, the Committee had agreed that they should not be moved forward for disposal until further consideration and discussions with bidders and partners about their potential use had taken place as they were culturally and strategically important sites linked to town centre regeneration.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and asked questions about the derelict state of the Victoria and Herschel Street properties and reasons for declaring the vacant St Martin's Place (SMP) offices as surplus when the Council may require them operationally in the future if Observatory House was sold. The Leader responded to the points raised and updated on the Council's accommodation strategy. It was stated that the Council would not return its offices to SMP therefore the asset could be declared surplus.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed the Asset Disposals Strategy set out at Appendix 1.
- (b) Approved the declaration of the assets listed in Appendix 4 as surplus and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Property, in consultation with the appropriate lead member and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to market these assets for disposal, subject to:

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i) The removal of 2 Victoria Street and 34 Herschel Street from the list of assets declared surplus.

(c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets and the Lead Member for Housing & Planning, to determine whether 2 Victoria Street and 34 Herschel Street should be declared surplus and to commence marketing.

(d) Approved the proposed Asset Disposals Programme budget.

55. Recommendations from the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals: Montem Site

A report containing the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee for Asset Disposals was considered that sought approval for the disposal of land assets at Montem Lane, which was one of a series of sites that were owned by the Council and opted to Slough Urban Renewal (SUR).

The Part II appendices were considered and noted without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The proposed sale had been subject to option review and a due diligence process and reflected the best consideration reasonably obtainable for the disposal. The Leader of the Council highlighted that the site had attracted a number of bids above expectations. The details of the bidders was set out in the exempt appendices and the highest bidder was noted to have a strong track record which gave confidence that the outcome the Council had sought to develop the site for much needed housing would still be achieved. The disposal would generate a capital receipt and remove and development risks from the Council.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and expressed the view that the proposed sale showed that by stepping in to develop the site the private sector was demonstrating it could do better for Slough residents and taxpayers than the Council. The Leader pointed out that the Council had already brought in the private sector via SUR and the proposed deal was good for the Council and taxpayers by securing both a capital receipt and the development of new housing.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee were agreed.

Resolved –

(a) Agreed to the disposal of the Montem Lane asset and to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to enter

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into the sale contract and the related legal documentation in connection with the disposal in accordance with the Heads of Terms and Site Development Plan (SDP) appended at Appendix 4 and 2.

- (b) Approved the Draft Formal Site Development Plan for Montem Lane so that this document can be considered to be “Adopted” in accordance with the terms of the SUR Partnership Agreement (PA).

56. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The comments of the People Scrutiny Panel on the home to school and post-16 travel assistance policies were received and noted during consideration of that item (minute 51 refers).

There were no further references from Overview & Scrutiny.

57. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I without disclosing any exempt information. It was not therefore necessary to exclude the press and public.

58. Asset Disposal Strategy Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

59. Disposal of Council Asset at Montem Lane Appendices

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm)