

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 27th February, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Ajaib, Anderson, Bains, Hulme, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Smith

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Mann and Akram

PART 1

112. Guillotine

The Leader stated that due to the extensive length of the agenda, particularly the budget reports, he anticipated that it was unlikely the Cabinet meeting would be concluded within the two and half hours (9.00pm) set out in the Executive Procedure Rules.

In accordance with Executive Procedure Rule (i) (a), the Leader therefore proposed and it was agreed to extend the meeting beyond this time to continue in the normal manner and complete the business remaining on the agenda.

Resolved – That the meeting continue in the normal manner beyond two and a half hours to complete the business remaining on the agenda.

113. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

114. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th January 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

115. Accounts and Audit Update

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that presented the audited Statement of Accounts for 2018/19.

The accounts had been considered by the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee on 22nd February 2023 at which it had been agreed that they be recommended to Council on 9th March 2023. However, given the significant issues in the preparation of the accounts and the audit, it was considered appropriate that the Cabinet also receive them and ensure the findings were taken into account and recommendations from the external auditors addressed.

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The context and key issues were summarised. The accounts for 2018/19 should have been prepared by 31st May 2019 but due to the deficiencies in basic record keeping and working papers five drafts were produced through to May 2021 when the new finance team joined the Council. At that point it was recognised that those accounts were still not fit for purpose and they were extensively reviewed resulting in 50 changes affecting 100% of the figures and 80% of disclosure notes. The key changes were set out including land and buildings incorrectly valued, MRP not charged in line with regulations, staff costs incorrectly capitalised and inadequate provisions for bad debts. The net value of the balance sheet had been reduced by over 40%.

The key deficiencies identified included inadequate accounting records; ineffective systems of internal control, risk management and governance; and a grossly inaccurate Annual Governance Statement. These issues had resulted in the external auditor, Grant Thornton, had indicated that it was highly likely that the audit opinion for 2018/19 would be a disclaimer of opinion. This was thought to be a unique opinion issued to a local authority and the Cabinet noted that it was likely to be repeated in 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the same deficiencies in the Council's accounting records during that period.

The timetable for the production of accounts for 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 was explained, with the accounts for the current year of 2022/23 expected to be prepared by 31st December 2023.

(Councillor Pantelic joined the meeting)

The Cabinet fully recognised the financial and accounting failures during that period that led to the significant delay in the accounts and the audit opinion. The approval of the accounts and the work that had been done by the new finance team on process improvements, as detailed in the series of Financial Action Plan updates in the past 18 months, would now provide a sounder financial base from which the Council could now move forward. The Executive Director emphasised the scale of work that the Council still faced and stated it was likely to take around five years to embed the necessary changes and reach financial stability.

Lead Members asked about the key risks to sustaining the progress that had been made, including the imminent departure of the interim finance team. Assurance was provided that the new finance structure was in place and posts were being filled. A handover process to the new Executive Director Finance & Commercial had already begun.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet formally received the report, recognised the deficiencies identified and affirmed its commitment to continue to deliver the improvements set out in the Financial Action Plan and address any issues raised by the external auditor.

Resolved –

- (a) That the accounts be received; and
- (b) That the issues arising from the preparation and audit of the statement of accounts set out in sections 2.3 to 2.9 of the report be noted in order to ensure that the findings were taken into account by Cabinet when making decisions; and
- (c) That any recommendations made by the external auditors be addressed.

116. Update on Objection to 2018/19 Accounts and issuing of Statutory Recommendations– Purchase of Observatory House

The Cabinet received a report from the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee regarding a report from the external auditors, Grant Thornton, in relation to an objection received from a member of the public on the 2018/19 accounts regarding the purchase of Observatory House.

The objection submitted had not been upheld by Grant Thornton and their letter setting of their findings had been presented to the audit committee. However, Grant Thornton had decided to make two statutory recommendations relating to the way the decision to acquire the property was taken; and the limited information made available to Members at the meeting of the Cabinet on 28th May 2018 when the decision to acquire Observatory House was made. Statutory recommendations needed to be considered and responded to by full Council and this would take place at the meeting on 9th March 2023.

Given the issues raised it was appropriate that Cabinet receive the auditors findings, lessons learnt and agree the actions be implemented. The specific recommendations were:

- *“Information to support decision-making – ensure that for important (in financial or strategic terms) decisions, sufficient and adequate information is made available to members within the formal governance processes to support the decisions made, including a comprehensive business case.*
- *Use of Lead Members & Directors Group – ensure that the informal Lead Members & Directors Group is not used as a substitute for formal decision-making by Cabinet and other parts of the formal member structure, ensuring there is adequate consideration and documentation of important decisions within the formal decision-making arrangements.”*

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The report set out the lesson learnt and the improvements made to decision making processes since 2018/19, including new processes to significantly improve the quality of reports for key decisions, including full business cases. Further recommended actions included additional training for Members and officers on governance, decision making and business cases.

The Cabinet noted that the objection had not been upheld, but accepted the findings leading to the issuing of statutory recommendations. The management response that would be considered by Council was endorsed. The Leader commented that further improvements were needed in the rigour of decision making processes, and timeliness of reports, and that this was a matter he would discuss further with the Chief Executive.

Resolved – That the report be received and that Cabinet ensure that the actions in relation to Cabinet reports and business cases be adopted.

117. Section 25 Report

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the Executive Director Finance & Commercial's (Section 151 Officer) report on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

The Council was required to consider such a report from the Section 151 Officer and it advised that the reserves were adequate for 2023/24, providing the extensive risks detailed in the report were contained and that the Council's financial strategy was delivered but would take a further five years to conclude and become financially stable. The key risks were considered including the fact that reserves, whilst adequate, were at the lower end of where they should be and continued support be forthcoming from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) including through their agreement to capitalisations directions. This was contingent on the Council delivering its challenging savings proposals and asset disposal programme.

The Cabinet noted that Section 151 Officers conclusion in paragraph 9.2 of the report that in the financial circumstances the Council was in it was impossible to give a level of assurance that would normally be required in a Section 25 report, but that the Council now had a well-developed and rigorous financial strategy in place and was therefore able to set a budget.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and expressed concerns at the level of reserves and the significant risks that the Section 151 had detailed in the report. The comments were noted.

After due consideration, the Cabinet agreed to recommend the report to Council on 9th March 2023.

Recommended – That Council had regard to the Section 25 report when making decisions about the calculation of council tax requirement.

118. Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the proposed capital programme for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

The strategy had been refocused on improvement works to operational assets and public realm works. The aim was to rationalise the capital portfolio, ensure necessary works to maintain the condition of retained assets and minimise other works. The impact was a reduced programme totalling £102m which was fully funded and would not require any additional borrowing. The programme was fully funded through grants, Section 106 contributions and capital receipts from the asset disposal programme, which was key element of the Council's corporate and financial strategy. Future disposals were crucial to help reduce borrowing and MRP.

The Cabinet commented that the programme was still relatively large and included some important transport, infrastructure and education schemes. Members asked how the programme would be properly managed to minimise slippage and Officers commented on the steps being taken to ensure schemes were delivered.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and commented on the proposed additional loan of £5m to GRE5 for works to address fire safety issues at Nova House. The Executive Director Finance & Commercial stated that a full report would be provided to Cabinet in March and the capital programme made the necessary provision if the proposals in that report were agreed.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed to recommend the capital programme to Council.

Recommended – That the Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28 as set out in the report and Appendix A be approved.

119. Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the Council's treasury management strategy for 2023/24 to 2027/28 which covered the borrowing and debt reduction strategy, prudential indicators, Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy and investment strategy, including loans to third parties.

The proposed strategies for MRP, annual investment strategy and approved counterparty list for investments were unchanged from 2022/23. A much improved overall position was reported with borrowing being repaid ahead of schedule and the Capitalisation Direction fully financed three years ahead of

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schedule. The Council was on track to repay the remaining £133m of temporary borrowing by September 2023, subject to the continued successful delivery of the asset disposal programme. The asset disposal programme had a target of sales for £50m in 2022/23 but was forecast to achieve £210m. The target for 2023/24 was £75m and the current forecast was £410m. The Council may be able to bring overall borrowing back down to a sustainable level by March 2025. The Lead Member highlighted the potential opportunity to pay off the pension fund deficit in 2023/24 which could yield a £5m annual revenue budget saving.

Lead Members welcomed the good progress that had been made over the past year and agreed the strategy should be recommended to Council.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and commented the relatively poor rates of return on investments under the strategic acquisitions programme and sought assurance a minimum rate of return of 5% per annum would be achieved in future. In response, it was commented that the main problem with the assets purchased in the past was that the cost of MRP had not been properly considered. The Council had no plans acquire new assets for investment purposes.

Recommended –

- (a) That the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2023/24 to 2027/28 be approved including:
 - i. Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2023/24 (Appendix 1)
 - ii. Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24 (Appendix 2)
 - iii. Approved Counterparty List (Appendix 3)
 - iv. Approved Countries for Investments (Appendix 4)
 - v. the Prudential Indicators for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Section 4 of the TMS)

120. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/24 and 30-Year Housing Investment Plan

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the proposed 30-year Investment Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and both the revenue and capital business plans.

The plan demonstrated that the Council was able to fund the proposals subject to the assumptions in the plan and that the HRA remained sustainable and viable over the 30-year period. The Council owned and managed approximately 7,600 properties of which there were 6,035 HRA social and affordable rented properties. No new acquisition or new build proposals were made in the business plan. Social rents would rise by 7% for 2023/24 as agreed by Cabinet in January, and service charges would increase by the

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same amount. The five-year HRA capital programme of £52m was reviewed. The main items included repairs and stock modernisation.

The Cabinet welcomed the fact that the HRA was in surplus and that the housing stock was generally in good condition. After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed and the report would be presented to Council on 9th March 2023.

Recommended –

That the recommendations be agreed and that it be presented to Council on 9th March 2023:

- (a) That the HRA revenue budget for 2023-24 (Table 1 & Appendix A) be approved.
- (b) That the HRA 5-year revenue budgets for 2023-24 to 2027-28 (Table 1 & Appendix A) be noted.
- (c) That the HRA 30-year revenue budgets for 2023-24 to 2052-53 (Appendix B) be noted.
- (d) That the HRA 5-year Capital Programme for a total £52.714m (Table 3 & Appendix C) be approved.
- (e) That the 30-year Capital Programme for 2023-24 to 2052-53 (Appendix D) be noted.
- (f) That the draft HRA reserves and balances for the 5-year Business Plan (Appendix E) be noted.

121. Update on Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that updated on the High Needs Budget position and the progress to date on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27.

The background to the current position was summarised and it was noted that in May 2021 the DSG was heading towards a cumulative deficit of more than £40m by 2026/27 and overspending by £7m per annum in 2020/21 with no plan to deal with these issues. A significant amount of work had been undertaken since May 2021 to address the problem, including a major cost reduction programme that was forecast to bring the DSG back into in-year balance by 2025/26. The Council had participated in the DfE Safety Valve programme and had formally submitted a plan to DfE in January 2023 which, if successful, would see the historic deficit of £27m finance by the DfE. The outcome of the submission was awaited. If successful, it was essential that the Council kept DSG in balance, otherwise the historic deficit would fall back

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to the Council. This would take sustained and proactive leadership and resources to ensure it could be delivered.

The Cabinet discussed the potential timeframe for staged payments to the historic deficit and asked if the Council would still have sufficient officer resource and expertise to manage it. The decision of the DfE was expected by the end of March and there would be regular monitoring and reporting. Members commended all the officers involved from finance, education and across the Council who had contributed to important work to address the issues.

The Cabinet then agreed to recommend the report to full Council.

Recommended – That the following be noted:

- (a) The forecast position for DSG spend in 2022/23 to 2026/27.
- (b) The overarching issues that had resulted in the DSG deficit and the actions taken to date to address these.
- (c) The Council had been taking part in the 'safety valve' intervention programme with the DfE and has submitted its final proposal for addressing the deficit on the High Needs Block.

122. 2023/24 Budget

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets summarised the revenue budget 2023/24 that was proposed to be recommended to full Council on 9th March 2023.

The budget context, assumptions and key risks were summarised. The Government had approved the Council's request to raise Council Tax by a total of 9.99%, which was 5% more than the usual referendum threshold. The additional income was important to increase the Council's tax base and would have a significant impact on the savings plans. A requirement of the proposed additional increase was that an enhanced Council Tax Reduction Scheme be put in place to protect the lowest income households and this scheme would be considered later in the meeting.

The two key parts of the Council's financial strategy were delivering the proposed savings programme which totalled £22.4m in 2023/24 and continuing to dispose of assets. The Lead Member explained the extensive and rigorous process to identify, test and agree each saving proposal. It was emphasised that it was essential the savings programme was delivered and directorates would be expected to identify alternative savings during the year if those set out were not achieved. Contingency against savings delivery had been made but non-delivery had to be avoided at all costs. The pressures included high inflation and a provision had been made for pay settlement of 4.8% and 4.9% for contract inflation. If the budget was successfully delivered

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the Council would already be on track to achieve almost half of the 2024/25 savings, with the remainder to be identified by May 2023.

The DLUHC Best Value Lead Commissioner addressed the Cabinet and highlighted the scale of the challenge the Council still faced. He emphasised the importance of culture change in the organisation and that this was a whole council process whereby every officer must adhere to their budget limits. The Commissioners had supported the Council Tax proposal, otherwise a higher savings target would have been required and there were no alternative proposals. The Improvement & Recovery Board had spent considerable time validating every savings proposal.

The Leader commented that there had been some slippage in the current year's savings programme, and although this had been offset by some corporate items to balance the budget overall, it was crucial that the Council improved its track record for savings delivery. Further work with Slough Children First would also need to take place to address the company's overspends.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed to recommend the revenue budget to full Council.

Recommended –

1. Approval of the 2023/24 budget to enable the Council Tax for 2023/24 to be set;
2. Approval of the Model Council Tax Resolution 2023/24 as set out in Appendix B;
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, to place a notice in the local press of the amounts set under recommendation 2 within a period of 21 days following the Council's decision;
4. Approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as based on the estimated financial deficit in the Capitalisation Direction and to be funded by capitalisation of:
 - a. £267.1m up to 2022/23
 - b. £31.6m for 2023/24
 - c. £58.4m for beyond 2023/24
5. Approve the overall General Fund revenue budget of £143.4m, to include:
 - a. growth for pressures of £12.2m
 - b. proposed savings by Directorates of £22.4m

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6. Approve measures to control spending and improve the finances of the Council at Appendix D

Noted:

7. The balanced budget position for 2023/24 requiring savings of £22.4m and the projected financial deficit between 2024/25 to 2027/28 .
8. The intention to increase Council Tax by 7.99% in 2023/24.
9. The intention to increase Council Tax by a further 2% in 2023/24 in respect of the Adult Social Care Precept.
10. The assumed funding for the protection of social care 2023/24 through the Better Care Fund..
11. That due regard has been had to the s.25 report by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial..
12. The minutes from the 2023/24 Budget Scrutiny Sessions at Appendix H.
13. Approve the process for access to contingency as set out in paragraphs 2.16.57 to 2.16.62.

Resolved – That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Finance & Commercial, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets, to amend and finalise any of the budget reports prior to be submitted to full Council for approval on 9th March 2023.

123. Financial Update Report - P9 2022/23

The Executive Director Finance & Commercial summarised the budget monitor for the period to the end of December 2022.

It was noted that that there was an overspend of £4.3m across service areas but this position was balanced through items such as an improvement in the collection fund, underspends in treasury and corporate budgets and the use of capitalisation. The capital programme was forecasting a £2.6m underspend.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

Resolved –

(a) That the following be approved:

- that the fully-funded capital scheme proposed to make efficient use of the DfT grant to a projected value of £1.943m as set out in paragraph 9.5 of this report be added to the capital programme

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- the virements as set out in Appendix E.

(b) That the following be noted.

- that the 2022/23 forecast year-end position for the General Fund, taking account of use of all capitalisation direction amendments, is a fully balanced position. However, within this, there is an overspend of £4.256m across service areas, comprising a further anticipated ask from SCF for contract funding support of £2.760m, shortfalls on savings initiatives within Council directorates of £2.1m and a range of other broadly offsetting under and overspends. This position is then balanced through an improvement in the collection fund position, underspends in Treasury and corporate budgets and the use of capitalisation;
- that the General Fund Capital Programme is forecasting an underspend of £2.633m at a spend of £26.022m;
- that the HRA is forecasting a surplus and contribution towards capital funding and HRA reserves of £2.604m, a £0.073m adverse variance against budget;
- that the HRA Capital Programme is forecasting to underspend against budget by £3.761m;
- that the DSG balance is forecast to be a cumulative deficit of £27.108m by the end of this financial year, reflecting an in-year deficit of £1.638m, with plans to reduce the in-year movement to a balanced position by 2025/26;
- that maintained schools are projecting a reduction in balances by 31 March 2023 from £9.555m to £6.478m, with 4 out of 16 schools expecting to be in deficit with an aggregate deficit of £0.741m.

124. Financial Action Plan - Update

The Cabinet received that latest update on the Financial Action Plan that summarised the work undertaken to address the financial issues the Council faced and the recommendations made by external agencies.

The comprehensive report detailed that the progress that had been made and the Cabinet was asked to recommend the report to Council. This was agreed.

Recommended –

- (a) That the summary update on the key areas of the work undertaken to respond to the many and very serious financial challenges and the recommendations made by external agencies be noted. Specifically, the report provided an update on the following issues:

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- Capitalisation Direction
- progress being made on generating capital receipts
- budgets
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
- the Council's borrowing levels
- accounts
- the dedicated schools grant
- the finance structure
- revenues and benefits
- Council accounting, HR and procurement system (ERP)
- commercial and procurement improvements
- internal audit actions
- company governance and actions

(b) Cabinet noted the progress and issues arising from the continued work on the above.

(c) Cabinet agreed to recommend the report to Council.

125. Approval to write-off individual debts greater than £15,000

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that sought approval to write-off uncollectable debts that exceeded £15,000 in relation to adult social care, council tax and business rates.

The total sum of the debts proposed to be written-off was £1.186m, although it was noted that much of this debt was very old and some of it dated back to 1997. In all cases requests for write-offs were only recommended after all avenues to collect the debt had been exhausted. The Cabinet approved the write-off requests as set out in the appendices to the report.

Resolved – That the write-off of those debts identified in the report be authorised.

126. Update on Discretionary Council Tax premium on empty properties and second homes

A report was considered that sought approval to give delegated authority to the Executive Director Finance & Commercial to devise a policy for additional Council Tax premiums to be introduced for empty homes and second homes.

It was noted that in May 2022 the Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill put forward discretionary Council Tax premium options on long term empty properties and dwellings occupied periodically (second homes). If the Bill received Royal Assent before 31 March 2023, these options would become available to billing authorities with effect from 1 April 2024 at the earliest.

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The Government had confirmed that billing authorities that wished to adopt premiums for second homes were required to make a determination confirming their requirements at least 12 months prior to the financial year in which the changes will come into effect, meaning that the Bill would need to obtain Royal Assent prior to 1 April 2023 in order to adopt the changes for the year commencing 1 April 2024.

After due consideration the recommendations were approved.

Resolved – That delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance, to devise a policy for additional Council Tax premiums to be introduced for:

- 100% premium for properties which have been empty and unfurnished for a period between 1 (previously 2) and 5 years;
- 100% premium for second homes; and
- To bring the policy to full Council once the legislation is in force.

127. Resilience contract for Revenues and Benefits work

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that sought approval for a contract to provide off-site temporary resources to process revenues and benefits work through a Framework Contract held by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The contract would deliver a saving of £0.890m to August 2025 in comparison to the current costs of using interim support which was £0.369m in 2023/24. The estimated contract value between 1st April 2023 to 28th August 2025 was £1.345m. It was noted that the contract was not with LB Tower Hamlets, merely that it was procured through a Framework Contract that they held.

The Cabinet asked about the performance management arrangements and in response the Executive Director Finance & Commercial stated that the contract enabled the revenues and benefits service to draw down staff where required, on a better value contract than the one currently in place, and that the support was needed whilst the restructure of the revenues and benefits services was implemented over the next year.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Authorised commencement of procurement for the provision of off-site processing resources through the Framework Contract held by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets;

- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award a contract.

128. Procure a provider of e-vouchers for Housing Support Fund awards

A report was considered that sought authority from Cabinet to commence to procure a 5-year contract to provide e-vouchers to help provide additional options for vulnerable residents who applied for help through the Housing Support Fund.

Currently support was via Paypoint and through vouchers to purchase food through the Sainsburys gifting platform with white goods supplied by Argos. By contracting with a new provider that had wider access to other supermarket outlets it would offer residents in receipt of support a wider choice to shop closer to where they lived or to shop around and achieve better value.

After due consideration the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Authorised commencement of procurement for the provision of an e-voucher provider.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award a contract.

129. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023-24

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

In agreeing the Council's request to raise Council Tax by 9.99% the Government had expressed an expectation that steps be taken to mitigate the impact on those least able to pay Council Tax. It was proposed that a further £1.2m be added to the scheme for 2023/24 to make it more generous. The current maximum reduction in Council Tax for working age households was 80% but the proposed new scheme would have a maximum reduction of 100%. Modelling suggested that 3,552 of the 6,606 working age households with the lowest incomes would not pay any Council under the revised scheme and a further 1,805 would pay less than they currently did. A minority of households in receipt of support would pay more and more funding would be provided to the Council Tax Hardship Fund.

The Cabinet welcomed the more generous scheme proposed that would increase the support provided to the lowest income households in Slough. In

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addition to the support for those households there was a further benefit in an anticipated reduction in collection costs. The scheme was subject to public consultation.

The Cabinet agreed to recommend the revised scheme to Council.

Recommended –

- (a) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 (Appendix D) be recommended to Full Council for adoption for the financial year 2023/24.
- (b) Agreed to allocate £0.040m into the Council Tax Hardship Fund and to use the Council's £0.253m allocation of the Council Tax Support Fund to protect the current levels of support provided to those taxpayers who would otherwise lose under the proposed scheme.

130. Approval of contract sum and update on business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

The Lead Member for Children's Services introduced a report that sought agreement for a delay in the approval of the Slough Children First (SCF) business plan for 2023 to 2028 and agreement for the contract sum for 2023/24.

It was recognised that the company required a high quality, long term business plan. The current plan was approved on an interim basis and the re-submitted plan had been subject to a review by Mutual Ventures. The new Executive Director People (Children) / Chief Executive of SCF had only recently started in post and it was considered appropriate to provide more time to re-draft the plan under the new leadership. It was anticipated that the new business plan for SCF be brought to Cabinet in Quarter 2 of 2023/24.

The Council was, as a minimum, required to agree the Contract Sum for SCF for 2023/24 and it was proposed that this be £36.067m, which was an increase of £4.632m on the 2022/23 base budget.

The recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Noted the draft SCF's business plan for 2023/24 to 2027/28 at Appendix A and agree that this should not be approved as the annual business plan.
- (b) Approved a Contract Sum for 2023/24 of £36.062m, an increase of £4.632m on the 2022/23 base budget.
- (c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Strategy and Improvement, in consultation with the Lead Member of Customer

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Services, Procurement & Performance, to offer an enhanced level of support services with a charging mechanism to reflect cost recovery.

- (d) Noted that a report will be brought back to Cabinet in Quarter 2 of 2023/24 with a new business plan for SCF, following consultation with key stakeholders and alignment with the Council's Corporate Plan.
- (e) Noted and accept the recommendations from the People Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group and delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to appoint lead officers to progress each recommendation and to request that the SCF Board of Directors ensure that these recommendations are considered and reflected in a new business plan.

131. Energy Flex Purchases 23/24 (Purchase Strategy)

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report on the purchasing strategy for energy.

The volatile market conditions following the war in Ukraine were noted and the strategy proposed aimed to minimise the Council's exposure to further price increases. If agreed, the Council would purchase 50% of its energy volume in advance and the detailed proposals were set out in the report. It was noted that since the report had been published the PFI schools had indicated that they no longer wished to be included in the contracts and this would have an impact on the volumes purchased.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations subject to the inclusion of the Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement and Performance, as well as the Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets, in the Member consultation process as part of the delegation. Decisions taken under the delegated authority should be reported to Members as highlighted in the Commissioners comments.

Resolved –

- (i) That the following purchase strategy be adopted:
 - a. Approved the purchase of 50% of the '23/24' energy volume for Summer 23 and Winter 23.
 - b. Approved the purchase of the remaining energy volume if the wholesale price for that forward period falls below £150/MWh (power) and 150p/therm (gas), the floor price and where feasible well below the floor price.
 - c. Approved the default position to purchase energy volume (power) on a month ahead, and gas on a day ahead (spot price) should wholesale prices for forward period remain above £150/MWh (power) and 150p/therm (gas).
 - d. Set a wholesale energy market price cap for the month ahead and Winter 23 of £250/MWh (power) and 300p/therm (gas) and if

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markets increase such that the cap is expected to be exceeded, or is exceeded, then Cabinet approves the purchase of the remaining energy volume for 23/24 to limit further cost exposure.

- (ii) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Place & Communities, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial (the S151 officer) and the Lead Members (Finance Oversight & Assets and Customer Services, Procurement & Performance) to purchase energy in line with the above guidelines.
- (iii) That officers be required to report back to Cabinet by February 2024 on the current state of energy markets and any proposed changes to purchasing strategy of future energy volume in the final year of the flex energy contracts 24/25.

132. Implementation of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) Boroughwide

The Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment introduced a report that set out why the Council should move from an ad-hoc approach for the provision of parking restrictions to the use of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) wherever practicable.

Implementation of CPZs would include public consultation in each case but the aim was to have a standard approach for the provision of parking restrictions to bring consistency. The Cabinet discussed that Colnbrook should be prioritised under the approach given the significant parking issues caused by its proximity to Heathrow Airport.

After due consideration the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the use of Controlled Parking Zones with resident permit schemes as outlined in the report, following the statutory consultation, as the Council's standard approach for the provision of parking restrictions.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to consider any objections received following the statutory consultation and to make the necessary traffic regulation orders to determine the final scheme for each location.
- (c) Approved the Parking Permit Policy provided as Appendix A

133. E-Scooters and e-Bikes trial and scheme

The Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment introduced a report that proposed to restart the e-scooter trial, subject to a tendering exercise,

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and award of a new contract to the successful bidder. The new contract would include the provision of both e-scooters and e-bikes for public hire.

The e-scooter trial in Slough had been suspended last year, however, it had been popular and well used scheme. The proposal was to re-start the scheme for a period of up to 4 years to cover the national trial period to May 2024. A follow up report would come back to Cabinet after national trial had ended to provide updates on the remaining trial period and any legislative and operational changes required by DfT.

The Cabinet emphasised that safety and responsible usage were key issues to be addressed in the new contract arrangements. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the restart of the e-scooter scheme in Slough, extended to include e-bikes, for a period of up to 4 years, to cover the national trial period up to May 2024 and any agreed trial extension by the Department for Transport (DfT) and subsequently the remainder of the 4-year term subject to the full legislation of e-scooters.
- (b) Approved the commissioning of a provider for the e-scooter/e-bikes trial.
- (c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to approve the award of contract and final scheme operations.
- (d) Noted that a follow-up report will be brought back to Cabinet after the national trial ends, to provide updates on the remaining trial period and any legislative and operational changes required by the DfT.

134. CCTV Services

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval for the discontinuation of the Council's dedicated CCTV team and the transfer of responsibility for public facing CCTV to Thames Valley Police from 1st January 2024.

The proposal would avoid annualised costs of £630k and bring an annualised budget saving of £105k. The discontinuation of the dedicated team would mean the incidental services currently provided by the CCTV team would be returned to become the responsibility of the originating service or be discontinued entirely. The report set out the issues involved with the alternative arrangements being put in place through to the handover to Thames Valley Police. The Cabinet welcomed the principle that CCTV would transfer to the Police and that this was part of a Thames Valley wide objective of the Police & Crime Commissioner.

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Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and expressed a number of concerns about the proposal including the lack of a clear plan; the decentralisation of the incidental services to Council departments; and data protection issues. The Cabinet noted the comments and highlighted that it was confident the Council could work with the Police to implement the handover and deliver a better service overall. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the cessation of responsibility for all public facing CCTV from 1 January 2024.
- (b) Noted that a further report would be presented in the Autumn to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to Cabinet to review SBCs role in our joint commitment with Thames Valley Police to community safety from 1 January 2024 onwards. This would not involve any financial commitment by the Council to CCTV.

135. Library Services

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills introduced a report on the future provision of the library service.

The report to Cabinet in March 2022 had approved the Library Service Plan 2022-27 following public consultation. It had been agreed that a further report would be provided to Cabinet 12 months after that decision to provide further recommendations on how best to deliver library services within the Council's constrained financial position in 2023/24.

The report recommended that in 2023/24 a predominantly self-service library service be delivered from the four existing buildings – The Curve, Britwell Hub, Cippenham Library and Langley Library. There would be amended opening hours as set out in paragraph 2.16.1 of the report, the maintenance of an online library offer and expanded volunteering opportunities. The proposals would deliver a further budget saving of £276k.

The Cabinet welcomed the proposal to retain the existing four buildings and highlighted the importance of ensuring the staffing arrangements were resilient so that the revised opening hours could be delivered as proposed. An update report would be provided to Cabinet in July 2023.

After due consideration, the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved a library model of predominantly self-service library service from 4 buildings across the borough (The Curve, Britwell Hub, Cippenham Library and Langley Library) with the opening hours set out in paragraph 2.16.1 of the report.

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- (b) That a report be received a report at July 2023 Cabinet to review the performance of the library service in the first 2 months of the 2023/24 operating model, including performance against planned opening hours and the blend of footfall across the opening hours.

136. Refresh of Corporate Plan

The Cabinet considered a report that set out the process for a refresh of the Corporate Plan that took account of developments since the current plan, 'Doing Right by Slough' was approved by Council in May 2022.

The recovery programme had evolved over the past year and the new census data needed to be considered. It was also important to undertake more resident engagement and this was a key part of the programme. The timetable was summarised and it was anticipated that the revised plan be considered by Cabinet in June and onto Council for approval.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the process, timetable and consultation plans for a refreshed Corporate Plan as set out in Appendix 1.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to finalise the draft Corporate Plan for public consultation following the elections in May 2023.

137. Improvement & Recovery Update

The Cabinet noted the detailed progress updates provided on the recovery and improvement programme.

The Commissioners one-year on letter to Ministers on their assessment of the Council's process was expected to be published shortly alongside the Ministerial response.

The update was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress made by the Council since the previous report in addressing the Directions of the Secretary of State be noted;
- (b) That the next steps be agreed as set out in the action plans and other workstreams that have been developed to address the Directions.

138. Recommendations from Cabinet Committee on Asset Disposals

There were no recommendations from the Cabinet Committee.

139. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of three scrutiny task and finish group reports on:

- Contract management (Overview & Scrutiny)
- Slough Children First Business Plan (People)
- Complaints Process (Customer & Community)

Lead Members welcomed the excellent work that scrutiny had done and this was a view shared by Commissioners as an improved model for future scrutiny. The Cabinet agreed to accept the recommendations and asked that progress on implementation be monitored and reported back.

The Cabinet asked that scrutiny members on the task and finish groups be commended for their reports.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Task & Finish Group reports from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Contract Management), People Scrutiny Panel (SCF business plan) and Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel (Complaints Process) be approved.
- (b) That the members of the Task & Finish Groups be thanked and commended for their reports.

140. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I of the meeting therefore it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

141. Approval of contract sum and update on business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF) - Appendix A

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.54 pm)