

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 11th June, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Basra, Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, Mohammad, D Parmar, S Parmar and R Sandhu

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Sarfraz

PART I

4. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mohammad declared that she worked for the NHS at a GP surgery. She remained logged in throughout the virtual meeting.

5. Election of a Temporary Vice-Chair to Cover Maternity Leave

The Chair proposed Councillor Mohammad as temporary Vice-Chair; this was seconded by Councillor Hulme and agreed by the Committee.

Resolved – That Councillor Mohammad be elected as temporary Vice-Chair for the duration of Councillor Sarfraz' maternity leave.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th March 2020 and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 21st May 2020

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2020 and the extraordinary meeting held on 21st May 2020 be approved as correct records.

7. Member Questions

None were received.

8. SBC Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Planning

The Service Lead – Strategy and Performance introduced a report that asked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider its role in scrutinising the Council's Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans.

Members were informed that on 18th May 2020 the Cabinet had agreed to develop two separate but related plans: a two-year Recovery Plan and a five-year Renewal Plan. The presentation slides provided in Appendix A of the report set out a high-level analysis of the impacts of Covid-19 which would be addressed in the plans for recovery and renewal. The Cabinet had also resolved to 'establish a joint Working Group of Cabinet and Scrutiny to work together to contribute to the work'.

It was explained that the plans were intentionally not yet fully formed, so to allow the Committee to provide input to develop the outline proposals. Members were asked to consider which key issues should be assigned to the

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work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and those of the three scrutiny panels.

The Service Lead – Strategy and Performance drew Members' attention to the following presentation slides set out in Appendix A of the report:

- Economic Impact – the following had been identified as areas Covid-19 had impacted in Slough: poverty, health and wellbeing, education, children's social care services, community, mental ill health, business and finance.
- Positive Trends – a number of positives had been identified, including: the adaptability of the Council's workforce in response to the crisis; the emergence of a 'One Slough' collaborative approach; enhanced joint working with partner organisations; and improved local knowledge about the residents of Slough.
- Approach – the key headings outlined on the slide would inform the recovery and renewal plans. Members' comments and views on where the emphasis should be placed would be sought during the development of future detailed plans.
- Our Approach to Renewal - the slide outlined the Council's long-term vision for the future approach to renewal.
- Appendix B of the report identified the key risks and mitigations arising from the Covid-19 crisis.

In concluding the presentation the Service Lead – Strategy and Performance highlighted the importance of utilising the scrutiny function to shape the strategic response to the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, it was explained that this period presented an opportunity for scrutiny to assert its profile and status within the Council.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A Member asked if there was a plan to return the officers who had been redeployed to support critical Council services, back to their 'day jobs'. In response, it was explained that officers would continue to tackle the response to Covid-19 and assist with the Council's medium and long-term recovery strategies for the foreseeable future.
- Responding to recommendation 'C' of the report – 'Assign specific issues to the Committee's work programme, and those of the other scrutiny panels' a Member sought clarification regarding how issues would be assigned. It was requested that prior to the next meeting further detailed information and data be provided to enable Members to fully understand the impact of Covid-19 and the pertinent issues arising from the pandemic.
- It was highlighted that Covid-19 had had a significant impact on Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. It was requested that an Equality Impact Assessment for Slough be provided to the Committee.

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- It was noted that there were nine working groups involved in the Covid-19 response. A Member asked that additional information about the role and remit of the groups be provided to the Committee.
- It was noted in the report that there would be financial implications arising from Covid-19 and that demand for services would be too high for the Council to meet. A Member requested that details about the services the Council anticipated would not meet demand, be provided to the Committee.
- In response to questions regarding work programming, it was reported that a training session open to all scrutiny members would be held prior to the next Committee meeting. The session would consider scrutiny good practice, scrutiny in light of Covid-19, work programming ideas for 2020/21, and the recommendations arising from the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Governance Peer Review.
- Referring to the Centre for Public Scrutiny guidance set out in section 5.2.2 of the report, it was noted that Members' capacity was already focused on supporting residents. Concern was raised regarding the second bullet point which stated that scrutiny officers' capacity may be reduced due to redeployment. It was stressed that in order for scrutiny at Slough to be successful, suitable officer resource was needed. It was highlighted that the Council's scrutiny function needed to support and reflect the five priorities of the authority, be outcome focussed, and achieve clear tangible benefits for Slough residents.
- Concern was raised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee often considered reports after decisions had been taken by the Cabinet, and this resulted in scrutiny performing a 'paper exercise'. Clarification was sought regarding the proposal for scrutiny and the Cabinet to work together on recovery and renewal planning. The Chief Executive explained that it was incumbent on officers and Members to ensure scrutiny was not a 'paper exercise'. It was stressed that scrutiny had a crucial role in developing policy and influencing decision-making.
- A Member requested that in future the Committee be afforded the opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny prior to reports being presented to the Cabinet. Particular reference was made to pre-scrutiny of budget and financial reports.
- Concern was raised regarding the imbalance of workload between the three scrutiny panels. It was noted that the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Panel had a wide remit and held significantly more meetings than the Education and Children's Services Panel. It was requested that more equitable work programming be established to ensure that no one panel was overburdened.
- It was suggested that joint panel meetings be held to ensure there was no duplication of work programming. It was also noted that Rule 30 of the Council's Constitution enabled all Members to raise a question at a scrutiny meeting.

The Chair thanked the Service Lead – Strategy and Performance for the report, and the Chief Executive and Directors for their attendance.

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Resolved –

- (a) That the information set out in section 5 of the report and appendices A and B be noted.
- (b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to work with the Cabinet to support recovery and renewal planning.
- (c) That the Service Lead - Strategy and Performance be requested to provide additional information, as detailed above, to the Committee.
- (d) That the comments raised, as detailed above, in relation to the scrutiny function and how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might work with the Cabinet in future, be noted.
- (e) That the issues arising from the Council's Covid-19 recovery and renewal planning be incorporated into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme, and those of the three scrutiny panels for the forthcoming year.

9. Annual Scrutiny Report 2019/20

The Service Lead – Strategy and Performance introduced the draft Annual Scrutiny Report for Members' consideration.

The Annual Scrutiny Report presented the work that had been undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the three scrutiny panels, and demonstrated the impact of scrutiny on the Council's policy making.

It was highlighted that the report included reference to the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Governance Peer Review and its recommendations to strengthen the scrutiny function. A key recommendation arising from the review was that scrutiny should be given greater status and support to enable it to focus on the key strategic issues facing the authority. The need for scrutiny to have a greater impact was acknowledged and this would be the ambition for future years.

The Chair invited Members to comment and ask questions.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Concerns were raised that the draft report was unclear and did not represent a true reflection of the work scrutiny had undertaken over the past year. It was noted that the report listed the items which had been considered; however there was little reference to the impact and outcomes scrutiny had achieved. Members were keen to embrace the LGA recommendations to improve the demonstrable impact of scrutiny.
- A Member commented that scrutiny often considered reports that were 'out of date' or had already been presented to the Cabinet; consequently, there was no opportunity for scrutiny to feed into the

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decision-making process or have any influence. It was felt that there should be a greater focus on pre-decision scrutiny in future.

- The importance of Member training was highlighted. It was agreed that a scrutiny training session would be arranged at the earliest opportunity. The session would present the final LGA Governance Peer Review Report recommendations, examples of best practice and effective scrutiny, and consider how scrutiny could support the Council's Covid-19 response.

Resolved – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Annual Scrutiny Report for submission to Council.

10. Members' Attendance Record 2020-21

Resolved - That the details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

11. Date of Next Meeting - 9th July 2020

Discussion took place regarding the work programme and the items that should be scrutinised at the next meeting. The Policy Insight Manager agreed to compile a list of items and forward it to the Chair and Vice-Chair for consideration.

Resolved –

- (a) That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 9th July 2020.
- (b) That the Policy Insight Manager agreed to compile a list of items for the next meeting and to forward it to the Chair and Vice- Chair for agreement.
- (c) That the scrutiny training session be arranged for the earliest possible date.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 7.57 pm)

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