

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Monday, 26th April, 2021.

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

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor R Sandhu

PART I

68. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

69. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 18th March 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

70. Member Questions

No Member Questions had been received.

71. Future Delivery Model for Slough Children's Services

The Interim Executive Director of People (Children) introduced a report that provided an opportunity to scrutinise the future delivery model for Slough children's services following the changes of governance agreed by the Cabinet on 15th March 2021.

The governance arrangements for Slough Children's Services Trust had been reviewed and it became a wholly owned company of Slough Borough Council from 1st April 2021. The company would be called Slough Children First Limited and would enter into a five year service delivery contract, with an option to extend by two years. The Committee noted the decisions to transfer additional services to the organisation in order to aid service coherence. The Director commented that the Council would have more influence and engagement than it previously had with the Trust and this would help services to be delivered seamlessly.

The report set out the financial, legal and operational issues relating to the changes and it was noted that whilst the total contract value was still to be finalised it would be circa £35m in 2021/22. This included the additional services proposed to be transferred which were the targeted Early Help and Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) services. The new arrangements would resolve the Trust deficit issues and the Cabinet had approved a loan from the Council to Slough Children First of £5m to provide working capital.

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During the course of a wide ranging discussion the following issues, questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- The principle of transferring NEET services to improve integration was welcomed in principle, particularly as provided high quality training and job opportunities for young people would be a key priority in the Covid-19 recovery plans. Members asked for the latest figures of 16 and 17 year old NEETs in Slough and the Director would provide these after the meeting.
- A Member highlighted that the Trust had been established due to the continued inadequate Ofsted failings when the services had previously been run by the Council. It was asked what lessons had been learned and how the improvement of services would be sustained under the new governance model. In response, it was noted that the model could provide the 'best of both worlds' as it would be strategically aligned to the Council but would be operationally independent. Good progress had been made on the improvement journey of children's services in Slough in recent years and it was emphasised this would continue to be the key priority in the new arrangements.
- A question was asked about how performance would be measured. An extensive performance management framework and monthly reporting arrangements were in place, overseen by Slough Children Board and a Quality & Performance Sub-Committee. There would also be regular reports on performance to scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The Committee asked how the financial reporting arrangements would be strengthened given the impact on the Council budget from the Trust deficits. The Director explained the processes that had been put in place including a Financial Monitoring Group that would involve the Council's Section 151 Officer and the company's Director of Finance.
- Discussions had also taken place about the use of Council's corporate services and clear and transparent SLAs would set out service expectations. SBC already provided support such as IT to the Trust so it was not expected there would any operational disruption to services in this regard.
- A number of questions were asked about recruitment, workforce development and the transfer of more staff to the new company. The TUPE process for affected staff would begin imminently and it was expected that circa 50 would transfer to the new company. Recruitment and retention of staff was a key issue and the Director highlighted some of the actions and plans in place to make Slough a place where social workers wanted to come to work. Whilst the organisation may not be able to compete on price it could do so on the professional challenge and development opportunities.

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- The governance arrangements were reviewed including the role of the company board. In response to a questions it was indicated that non-executive directors would receive some payment for their services but not Council nominated members of the Board. The process for recruiting an independent chair of Slough Children First was underway and interviews were planned in the next few weeks. Advertisements had been circulated for non-executive directors and strong interest had been received. Three Council representatives would be on the Board – the lead member and two senior officers.

The Committee discussed the future arrangements for scrutiny and requested that regular reports be received by the relevant scrutiny panel throughout the year with an annual report to Overview & Scrutiny.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee thanked the Director for the report and presentation and agreed to note the report.

Resolved – That the report and the decisions of the Cabinet of 15th March 2021 be noted.

72. Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21

The Strategy & Policy Lead introduced a report on the draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21.

The Annual Report was presented in a new format based on feedback on previous years reports and it focused on highlighting areas where scrutiny had been able to add value. The Committee agreed that the draft summarised the work that Overview & Scrutiny and scrutiny panels had done throughout the year including various task and finish groups that had presented detailed recommendations to Cabinet.

It was noted that the Joint Cabinet Scrutiny Working Group had also developed proposals to restructure the scrutiny panels next year and introduce a number of improvements to strengthen scrutiny. Members commented that the respective workloads of the panels had not been well balanced in the past year and that in future it was suggested each panel have at least one task and group during the course of the year. It was noted the restructure of the panels had been designed to improve the balance of the workload of the panels and reflect the new directorate structure of the Council following the Our Futures Transformation Programme.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Annual Report was endorsed and it was agreed it would be recommended to Council.

Resolved – That the Annual Scrutiny Report be endorsed and presented to Council.

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73. Annual Petitions Report 2020/21

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced a report that provided the Committee with an details of number of petitions received throughout the year and the Council's responses to them.

A similar number of petitions had been received in 2020/21 compared to the previous year, with an increase in the proportion of e-petitions reflecting the fact that collected signatures on paper petitions had been more difficult during period of 'lockdown' through the Covid-19 pandemic. One petition had triggered a debate at full Council.

Members commented on a number of aspects of the report including the apparent similarity of Council responses to petitions on parking matters which was a service in receipt of a high number of petitions. Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that the concerns being raised by residents in such petitions was being carefully considered by officers and that responses should reflect the individual circumstances rather than be generic responses. It was suggested that given the high number of petition on parking matters that the relevant scrutiny panel may wish to consider parking schemes and restrictions in developing its work programme for next year.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That the Annual Petitions Report 2020/21 be noted.

74. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved – That the Members' Attendance Record for 2020/21 be noted.

75. Date of Next Meeting - 10th June 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10th June 2021.

As it was the final meeting of the municipal year, the Chair thanked members of the Committee for their contribution and hard work during the year. A vote of thanks was proposed and agreed to Councillor Dhaliwal for chairing the Committee throughout the year and ensuring that a full programme of scrutiny meetings had continued despite the disruption to meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.32 pm and closed at 7.39 pm)