

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

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Mann (Vice-Chair), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Hulme and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Gahir and Smith

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Akram

PART 1

59. Declarations of Interest

Item 4 (Minute 62 refers) – Council Taxbases 2022/23 – Councillor Mann declared a personal interest in that she was the Chair of Britwell Parish Council. She stayed in the meeting and voted on the item.

60. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th December 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20th December 2021 be approved as a corrected record.

61. Recovery Plan - Update

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight, Council Assets & Performance and the Director of Finance introduced the third in a series of reports that updated the Cabinet on the work being undertaken to improve all aspects of the Council's financial and governance processes through the Finance Action Plan. The report would also be presented to Council on 27th January 2022.

The Cabinet noted the detailed progress set out including on the statement of accounts and year-end close; budget setting; companies governance and responding the recommendations of the Grant Thornton, DLUHC and CIPFA reviews. The format of the report would be revised when work on the broader Council recovery plan began and this wider work was a point highlighted in the Commissioners comments that an Improvement and Recovery Plan was required in response to the Ministerial Directions.

Lead Members reviewed progress in a number of specific areas including financial governance arrangements; the newly identified £2.6m provision for refunds to tenants arising from the Thames Water v Southwark case; and the progress in reviewing the companies, particularly James Elliman Homes. The Director of Finance responded that a comprehensive and systematic review was taking place of each company and some of the issues identified were complex and would take time to resolve. Significant progress was being made and an update on each company was expected to be presented to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee at its meeting on 1st March 2022. It was noted that there were some contracts within corporate related to financial systems that had been identified and were currently being worked on

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which it was likely would not be brought forward as early as would have been wished to renew procurement. In relation to financial governance it was noted that a new internal Finance Board had been established, which involved Opposition councillors and Commissioners.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance stated that further historic financial issues may still be identified as work continued on the accounts from 2018/19 and subsequent years, although he confirmed that the finance team currently had sufficient resources and expertise to carry out the programme of work in the Finance Action Plan. The Cabinet noted the progress that had been made on establishing a permanent and sustainable staffing structure for the finance department and highlighted that this was a key priority.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and asked questions about the misclassification of a number of investment properties; the Dedicated Schools Grant; and the approach to recovering bad debts. The Director of Finance responded to the queries raised and provided assurance that the Council was stepping up its activity to recover debt but also needed to make appropriate provision for bad debt in its accounts.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet noted the report and agreed to recommend it to Council.

Recommended – That the current position on the Finance Recovery Plan be noted and that the report be recommended to Council on 27th January 2022.

62. Council Taxbases 2022/23

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight, Council Assets & Performance and the Director of Finance introduced a report on the number of properties in Slough and their categories of occupation for the purpose of determining the Council Tax base for the borough for the 2022/23 financial year.

Lead Members asked about the potential impact of the economic impacts of Covid-19 on the collection rate. It was responded that the collection rate had been set at 98.2%, which was the same figure as for 2021/22 but lower than the 98.4% in 2020/21, due to the difficulties collecting Council Tax during and following the pandemic. Recovery work for 2019/20 and 2020/21 Council Tax debt continued. The Cabinet also noted the position regarding Parish Councils and Council Tax Support as set out in paragraphs 2.15 to 2.17 of the report.

Councillor Smith addressed the Cabinet and asked about the use of Covid grants to support families with children with Council Tax. This query would be picked up outside of the meeting.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

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Resolved –

That it be approved that:

- i. The provision for uncollectable amounts of Council Tax for 2022-2023 be agreed at 1.8% producing an expected collection rate of 98.2%;
- ii. the Council Tax base calculation for 2022/23 of 42,286.2 Band D equivalent dwellings (being 43,061.3 x 98.2%);
- iii. that no notional funding be passported to Parish Councils in respect to Council Tax Support as was the case in 2021/22.

That it be noted that:

- iv. the Council Tax base be broken down as follows between local parishes and the rest of Slough:

Area	Band D Equivalent Dwellings
Parish of Britwell	836.4
Parish of Colnbrook with Poyle	1,811.3
Parish of Wexham	1,393.9
Slough (unparished)	38,244.6
Total Tax-Base	42,286.2

- v. the ongoing work to estimate the 2021/22 year end Council Tax position be noted.

63. HRA Rents & Service Charges 2022/23

The Cabinet considered a report that set out the proposed changes in housing rents and service charges for 2022/23 following the annual rent review for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties.

It was noted that the report would also be reviewed by the Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel on 25th January 2022.

The process of the rent review was governed by the Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Framework and Standards and the Council was committed to setting rents using the Rent Standard guidance. The proposal to increase rents by 4.1%, which was CPO plus 1%, was permitted within the Rent Standard. It was also proposed that service charges rise by 4.1%.

Lead Members asked about the Commissioners comments set out in the report that highlighted the importance of delivery the service improvements of the new IT system which would achieve significant efficiencies and provide greater detail on the service charge calculation to tenants and leaseholders. Officers confirmed that implementing the new NEC Housing IT System

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(formerly Northgate) was a key priority and was due to go live in the second quarter of the year.

Councillor Smith addressed Cabinet and queried the information provided to tenants on Universal Credit about the rent and charge increases. Officers provided assurance that each notification letter gave a clear breakdown and the Council worked closely with the Department for Work & Pensions on data sharing to ensure the respective systems were aligned.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That Council house dwelling rents for 2022/23 increase by 4.1% (CPI + 1%) with effect from Monday 4th April 2022. This was in line with current government guidelines and legislation.
- (b) That Garage rents, heating, utility and ancillary charges increase by 4.1% (CPI + 1%) with effect from Monday 4th April 2022. This was based upon the September CPI figure.
- (c) That Service charges increase by 4.1% (CPI +1%) with effect from Monday 4th April 2022. This was based upon the September CPI figure.

64. A4 Experimental Bus Lane

The Lead Member for Transport, Planning & Place introduced a report that proposed that A4 experimental bus lane be made permanent.

The bus lane had been introduced through Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs) in 2020 between Dover Road and Uxbridge Road. The Lead Member summarised the reasons why the recommendation was to make the bus lane permanent during peak time as part of the Council's agreed policies to promote modal shift and reduce reliance on private cars, promote sustainable and active travel, improve public health and air quality.

The Cabinet noted the background and the report and appendix pack set out the consultation feedback and monitoring data collected within the period of the experimental orders which for this scheme came into operation on 4th December 2020 for a period not extending beyond the end of February 2022. The journey time for buses had decreased by 2 minutes and for cars it had increased by just under 3 minutes along the longest link of the scheme. There had been no major increase in accidents.

Lead Members had a detailed discussion about a range of issues including public consultation and air quality. The scheme had been changed from full time to peak time following a significant number of objections and a petition signed by over 5,000 residents. Since the introduction of the peak time scheme a significantly reduced number of objections had been received and

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these were set out in detail in the report and appendix. The air quality data was set out fully in Appendix 1 to the report. Air quality had improved in 2020 and 2021 although this could not be attributed to the bus lane. The data did suggest that the bus lane had not led to a worsening of air quality and the data would continue to be monitored.

The Cabinet noted the recommendations of the Place Scrutiny Panel which had reviewed the scheme at its meeting on 1st December 2021. Officers had responded to each of the points raised which included standardising bus lane operations in Slough, making the bus lane available to electric vehicles and having a segregated cycle lane. The Cabinet had previously supported in principle a segregated A4 cycle lane if external funding could be secured.

Councillor Smith commented on a number of aspects of the proposal, particularly in relation to air quality and he requested that the Cabinet defer a decision as in his view the data was not sufficiently robust to make the scheme permanent. Councillor Gahir expressed support for the bus lane in principle but asked the Cabinet to take steps in future to prevent 'rat-running' and to support schools to promote more sustainable travel and reduce the congestion caused by the 'school run'. The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health stated that the latter point was an issue the Wellbeing Board could look into further.

The Cabinet carefully considered all of the information provided and agreed to make the peak time A4 bus lane permanent.

Resolved –

- (a) That following consideration of all matters set out in the report and appendices, the recommendation for the Bus Lane experimental traffic regulation orders (ETROs) to be made permanent be approved.
- (b) That authority be given to the Executive Director of Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport, Planning and Place, to proceed through the legal process to enable the ETRO's to be made permanent.
- (c) That approval be given for additional works including signing and lining be undertaken to improve road safety and approve the update of signs to also permit vehicles with authorised green numbers plates to use the bus lane during operational hours.

65. Corporate Energy Procurement Strategy and Contracts (April 2022 - March 2025)

The Group Manager Asset Management introduced a report on the procurement of the Council's corporate energy supply contracts.

It was noted that energy costs were risen sharply and a strategy was proposed in the report to seek to mitigate the financial impacts by adopting a

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flexible and dynamic approach to procurement. If no action was taken an additional revenue pressure of more than £3m would develop and the actions proposed would partially mitigate this risk. The energy procurement strategy would also be aligned to the Asset Disposal Plan to maximise cost avoidance and further reduce the financial pressures over the next three years.

Lead Members welcomed the approach being proposed. The use of green energy was discussed and it was agreed this was a consideration as part of the Council's wider policy agenda. The Cabinet also encouraged Officers to be imaginative about the ways to reduce energy consumption in the future, for example though solar powered street lights in future.

The Cabinet approved the recommendations. There were a number of operational issues to resolve in the way the strategy would be implemented and it was therefore agreed that a report be taken to the Council's internal finance board in March 2022 for a discussion on the overall arrangements for energy procurement.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report and the financial impacts of procuring energy contracts for the Council be noted.
- (b) That the corporate energy procurement strategy over the next three years be approved.
- (c) That delegate authority be given to the Executive Director of Place and Community to;
 - i. access the DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System) established by Gwynedd Council for the procurement of electricity and gas and award call-off contracts under the said DPS; and
 - ii. to enter into a consultancy agreement with Beond to facilitate the management of energy contracts under the DPS as required by the access agreement to that DPS.
- (d) That the centralisation of the management of the corporate energy contract, meter commissioning and meter decommissioning across Council assets to the Asset Contract Management Team to improve contract management and reduce costs be approved.
- (e) That a report be taken to the Council's internal finance board in March 2022 for a discussion on the overall arrangements for energy procurement.

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66. Procurement of substance misuse recovery and treatment services including shared care

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report that sought approval for a one-year contract extension to the current contract for the Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Service, which were currently been delivered by Turning Point and Farnham Road GP Practice.

Officers recognised that procurement activity should have commenced earlier and that Cabinet approval for an extension should have been sought earlier. The extension requested would provide sufficient time to design and deliver a new substance misuse and treatment service model aligned to the new national drugs strategy: *From harm to hope: a 10-year drug plan to cut crime and save lives*.

In response to questions raised by the Cabinet it was noted that whilst the services proposed were not mandated they were clearly set out as requirements in the public health grant funding. The Cabinet agreed the proposed one year extension should be granted with a further report to Cabinet on the longer term approach which took account of the new national strategy.

Resolved –

- (a) That the extension of the existing contract to Turning Point for Provision of Substance Misuse Recovery Services to the maximum value of £864,000, and to Farnham Road GP Practice for Shared Care Provision and Clinical services for adults with substance misuse (Farnham Road) to the maximum value of £256,000 be approved, giving a combined maximum value of £1,120,000 to cover the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director for People – Adults, in consultation with the Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health, to enter contract documentation for the extension.
- (c) That it be noted that following further details regarding the national drugs strategy, a report would be brought back to Cabinet in Spring 2022 for a decision to commence procurement (this is dependent upon the timely publication of further details from the drug strategy, the Cabinet date is subject to revision).

67. Procurement of services for integrated care and support of extra care housing

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval for a two-year contract extension for the provision of integrated care and support in extra care, backdated to March 2021.

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The contract was currently being delivered by Creative Support Ltd under implied terms and at the same rates as previous contract.

Lead Members noted the acknowledgement from Officers that procurement should have commenced in Spring 2020 and that there had been procedural defects as with the previous report. The principal reason for the delay in formalising the extension was the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet asked about the possibility of a shorter extension, however, Members were advised that it would take time to design and deliver new commissioning arrangements and the duration of the proposed extension was required for this procurement to take place. A full timetable was set out in section 2 of the report.

The recommendations were agreed and a report would be provided to Cabinet on the proposed new model later in the year, following a report to the People Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved –

- (a) That the extension of the current contract to Creative Support for Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care to the value of £848,200 per annum for a period of two years be approved. This was equal to £1,696,400 (one million, six hundred and ninety-six thousand, four hundred) over two financial to cover the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2023.
- (b) Agreed to commence a new commissioning process to design a revised model of Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care services.
- (c) Agreed to delegate authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health, to enter contract documentation for the extension and to commence the process for commissioning new services.
- (d) That it be noted that a report would be brought back to Cabinet for a decision on the proposed new model and procurement process, after a report has been presented to People Scrutiny Panel.

68. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The comments of the Place Scrutiny Panel had been considered as part of the decisions on the A4 Experimental Bus Lane.

There were no further references from Overview & Scrutiny.

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69. Notification of Key Decisions

The Cabinet considered and endorsed the Notification of Key Decisions published on 17th December 2021 which set out the key decisions expected to be taken by Cabinet over the next three months.

Resolved – The published Notification of Decisions was endorsed.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.33 pm and closed at 9.28 pm)