

## **People Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Monday, 31st January, 2022.**

**Present:-** Councillors Qaseem (arrived 7.56pm), Kelly (Vice-Chair, the chair for the duration of the meeting), Ajaib, Basra, Begum, Matloob, Mohammad and Sandhu

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Gahir and Hulme

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Brooker

### **PART 1**

#### **25. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Basra declared that she carried out work for a number of organisations in the education sector. She stayed and participated in the meeting.

Councillor Mohammad declared that she worked for the NHS. She stayed and participated in the meeting.

Councillor Kelly declared that he worked for Slough and East Berkshire CofE Multi Academy Trust (SEBMAT). He stayed and participated in the meeting.

#### **26. Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 December 2021**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

#### **27. Member Questions**

No Member Questions had been submitted.

#### **28. Update on Draft Budget Proposals 2022/23 - People Directorates and Slough Children First**

The Panel received presentations from the Executive Directors of People (Children) and People (Adults) on the budget proposals and savings for 2022/23 relating to children and adult services respectively.

##### People (Children) services and Slough Children First

The Interim Executive Director Children, who was also the Chief Executive of Slough Children First, outlined details of progress made on the 2021/22 budget and savings proposals relating to Slough Children First and SBC children and education services for 2022/23.

The SBC savings for 2021/22 were on track to be achieved with a £8k adverse position to budget at present which could be mitigated from an

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underspend in other related areas. The savings target for 2021/22 was £1.044m and Members were reminded of the areas within which this was achieved. Key issues for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were identified as –

- SEND local area inspection had highlighted major systemic and sustained weaknesses across the system since 2014. The service had been impacted from the downgrading of SEND case officers (resulting in 85% turnover) which meant that there was a significant backlog of overdue statutory EHCP applications. It was noted that an action plan to address the points raised following the inspection was due to be completed for submission by 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and would be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.
- Home to School Transport savings had been re-profiled across two years. Future changes would be subject to consultation.
- Children's Centres: the options to reduce centres of up to 5 had been carefully considered and would be consulted on.
- Staffing reductions across children's services: Although initial proposals had included a reduction of two Attendance Officers which would have resulted in the services' inability to track vulnerable children which in turn presented safeguarding issues; this had been revised to a reduction of one Attendance Officer.
- Slough Children First was reporting an overspend of £1.3m in 2021/22 and the reasons for this were explained. Additional savings totalling £1.5m had been identified to mitigate the pressures. Almost £900k of the additional savings were service efficiencies and income generation.
- The savings target for SBC children's services in 2022/23 was £1.1m and for Slough Children First the savings target was £4.7m including £2.01m of growth to be absorbed.
- The 2022/23 SCF savings proposals included £494k in service reductions in targeted early help by deleting some staffing posts; staffing savings of £1.2m through reducing management posts and reducing agency and Innovate team spend; and £2.0m of income generation such as health contributions to packages and public health income.

The Panel was informed of the considerable pressures that children's services faced in terms of demand for services, cost pressures and workforce issues such as recruitment and retention. The work being undertaken to mitigate these pressures were set out.

Members asked a range of questions and the discussion is summarised as follows:

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- SEND – Members expressed concern about the statement that weaknesses had been evident since 2014 but had apparently not been satisfactorily addressed. Members asked about the plans in place to address the weaknesses. The Associate Director for Education & Inclusion explained that it had been an area inspection with joint responsibility shared between the Council and other partners. A detailed Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was being produced jointly by the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group and was due to be considered by the Cabinet in February. One of the immediate actions was to address the issue of the downgrading of SEND case officers in the previous restructure as staffing capacity was key to reducing the significant backlog of overdue statutory EHCP applications.
- Agency staffing – it had been stated that workforce issues had been a major pressure and there had been an over-reliance in SCF on agency staff. Members therefore asked about the potential impacts of the proposed reduction of £0.9m in agency staff spend and whether management was confident permanent recruitment and retention would be successful. The SCF Director of Operations commented that good progress had been made in 2021/22 on the workforce and making Slough a place social workers and other professionals found to be an attractive place to work, including with good development opportunities. A detailed workforce plan was therefore in place and whilst it was recognised the targets were ambitious they were considered to be achievable. In response to a question it was stated that a 'good' authority would generally have approximately 15% of its workforce as agency with Slough currently at 35%.
- Income generation – Members asked how confident Officers were that the £2.0m of income generation could be secured. The Executive Director was confident the figure could be achieved by working closely with health partners in particular, and that this approach had worked well elsewhere. Expertise had recently been brought in to Slough to take this work forward.
- Attendance services – a number of questions were asked about the issue of school attendance in the post-Covid period and the enforcement and monitoring activity for children out of school, particularly those that were causing anti-social behaviour issues in places such as Chalvey. The respective roles of the attendance officers, youth work, early help and, if required, other agencies such as the Police were noted.
- Statutory duties – the Panel asked whether Officers were confident the Council could meet its statutory duties relating to children's services within the budgets proposed. In response, it was noted that resources would need to be prioritised to certain services, e.g. SEND to improve the timeliness in processing statutory EHCP applications. There were pressures of rising demands and costs and these would need to be

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managed by ensuring the right support was provided at the right time by the right agency working together with partners. Continuing to meet statutory requirements over the coming years with the need to make further savings would be challenging.

- Vacant posts – a question was asked about the amount of time vacant posts in children’s services had been unfilled. It was agreed this information would be collated and provided to the Panel outside of the meeting.
- Home to School Transport – Members asked about the size of the total budget in view of the saving in year of £0.1m and whether it would be possible to reduce this spend through the admissions process by placing children in schools closer to their homes. The total budget was approximately £3.8m. There were statutory provisions in place for schools admissions and the Home to School transport policy would be further reviewed in the next year.

The Panel discussed a range of other issues including provision for unaccompanied asylum seekers, safeguarding issues and the continuation of DfE funding. At the conclusion of the discussion the budget and savings proposals related to SBC children’s services and SCF were noted.

### People (Adults) services

The Executive Director People (Adults) gave a presentation on the current budget position, risks and proposed savings for 2022/23. The net budget in 2021/22 was £46m and delivery on savings totalling £3.8m was progressing well. The emerging risks included the ongoing impacts of the Covi19 pandemic and demand for social care above planned levels. Members noted the position regarding national social care reform and concerns about increased provider and workforce costs. The savings proposals in 2022/23 totalled £5.9m of which £4.8m was the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme. The key elements of the programme were summarised and it was noted there would be a consultation on client charging in the next year.

An update on the closure of provider services was provided following scrutiny of the proposal in September 2021. The Panel was assured that by the end of December 2021 all people had been offered a new assessment and care plan and most people had alternative services in place to meet their needs. The breakdown of alternative provision as set out in the report was noted as was the fact that all people would receive a further review at 6 weeks. Feedback from families had been positive overall. The savings target was on track to be achieved. Members particularly welcomed the fact that the report included the lesson learned during the process including early engagement with legal and HR, early and meaningful consultation, keeping clear audit trails and that change can mean better outcomes for service users. The Panel agreed these points be taken forward in any future such exercises across the Council when making changes to services.

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*(Councillor Qaseem joined the meeting)*

Members asked a range of questions and the discussion is summarised as follows:

- Workforce – in response to a question about the impact of the business support savings, the Director commented that there would be a staff consultation for relevant posts but the impacts for the service could be managed as the main retention issues were not in business support roles but were for social workers, occupational therapists and in the commissioning team.
- Unit costs for residential care – it was noted that Slough currently paid slightly less for places for neighbouring areas but that the cost pressures were rising, partly because of peoples complex needs.
- Provider services – a question was raised about why some service users had not had their assessment and whether those that now had alternative provision had accessed other services locally. In response, it was noted that a small minority of services users (3) had stated that they no longer required a service hence no further assessment was undertaken. The Panel was assured that where alternative provision had been identified that it was local and met people's assessed needs, often better than previous provision had done. Members asked for further detail be provided to members of the Panel outside of the meeting on the continued monitoring following the six-week reviews. It was noted these reviews took place six weeks after the alternative provision began so the feedback was likely to be sometime after March 2022. In terms of the staff redundancies it was reported that all staff were given the necessary opportunities and support for redeployment.
- Statutory duties – Members asked if the Director was confident the Council could continue to meet its statutory duties whilst continuing to deliver savings. The Director confirmed that the Council was currently managing to meeting statutory requirements at the present time and was in a reasonable position for the future, although there were significant pressures on social care services and the scale of future budget savings requirements for Slough meant that any future proposals would need to be carefully considered and it would be challenging to deliver further significant savings.
- Adult social care reform – the Director summarised the emerging picture on the Government's proposed reforms. There were no significant new resources in the short term for local authorities and the financial implications of the care cap were yet to be fully worked through. There would also be a new audit regime for adult social care and this would require resource for performance and data support which wasn't currently in place in Slough.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

**Resolved** – That the budget updates for children’s and adult services be noted.

**29. Forward Work Programme**

The Panel considered the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. This would include a report on the SEND action plan and adult social care commissioning contracts in March.

The Panel agreed that in the next municipal year it should scrutinise the impacts of the health and care system changes with the establishment of the Integrated Care System.

**Resolved** – That the work programme be agreed.

**30. Members' Attendance Record**

**Resolved** – That the record of Members’ attendance for the 2021/22 municipal year be noted.

**31. Date of Next Meeting - 31 March 2022**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.31 pm and closed at 8.44 pm)