

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 20th June, 2022.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Strutton

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st and 29th March and 17th May 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 21st March 2022, 29th March 2022 and 17th May 2022 be approved as a correct record.

3. Cabinet portfolios and Lead Member responsibilities 2022/23

The Cabinet formally noted the portfolios and responsible Lead Members appointed by the Leader of the Council, as detailed in Appendix A to the report. The Leader explained the rationale for the changes to some portfolios and appointment of an additional Cabinet member, bringing to the total to nine. It was also noted that the Leader had appointed Councillor Pavitar Kaur Mann as Deputy Leader of the Council in accordance with Part 2 Article 7 (10) of the Constitution.

The report was noted and recommendations agreed.

Resolved -

(a) That the portfolios and responsible Lead Members as appointed by the Leader of the Council be noted.

(b) That the appointment of Councillor Pavitar Kaur Mann as Deputy Leader of the Council be noted.

4. Council Tax Energy Bill Rebates Scheme

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report that set out the recommended approach for the utilisation and award of Discretionary Energy Bill Rebates.

It was noted that from 1st April 2022, households were entitled to a non-repayable energy payment rebate of £150, known as the Council Tax Rebate, for every household in Council Tax bands A-D. The Council was required to provide a discretionary scheme for those in bands E-H who were

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in need but not entitled to the Council Tax Rebate. The proposed scheme was set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The Lead Member stated that the scheme had been designed to support those most in need and balanced fairness with administrative efficiency. It was explained that the scheme would run from November until the funds had been used and that the discretionary fund totaled £363,000.

An update was provided on the rebate and it was noted that the Council had paid the £150 to all residents in Council Tax bands A-D who paid their Council tax by Direct Debit. Households that did not pay by Direct Debit had been invited to apply to receive the rebate.

Councillor Strutton addressed the Cabinet and welcomed the discretionary scheme overall. He asked about payments to pensioners and why the rebate hadn't been credited to the Council Tax bills for ease of payment. The Lead Member responded that the Government had not permitted Councils to make the payment in that way and that meant even households in Council Tax arrears would receive the rebate.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet approved the policy.

Resolved -

- (a) That the policy at Appendix 1 to the report for the allocation of the discretionary funding to support vulnerable households to meet their energy bills be approved. The following groups would be supported:
 - i. A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E-H and are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Current cases 200 costing £30,000
 - ii. A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E-H and are entitled to a reduction under the Council Tax (Reduction for Disabilities) Regulations 1992. Currently 30 cases costing £4,500
 - iii. A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E-H and are entitled to a reduction as a result of Severe Mental impairment. Currently 5 cases costing £750
 - iv. A single additional payment of £30 (in addition to the mandatory payment) will be awarded to any household who resides in a home with a Council Tax band A to D and is in receipt of Council Tax reduction on the 1st June 2022. Currently 9,500 cases costing £285,000
 - v. Retain a small pot of £43,200 to make awards for energy support identified through the Household support fund scheme.

- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Council's Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Lead Member for Financial Oversight and Council Assets, to make technical scheme amendments to ensure the scheme meets the criteria set by the Government and the Council.

5. Finance Department Restructure

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets presented a report which sought approval to a restructure of the finance and commercial services sections within the Corporate Operations Department.

The Council's external auditors and various recent Government reports had highlighted the need to significantly strengthen the finance and commercial services function and the proposed restructure sought to put in place a structure that was sustainable and underpinned the future success of the department and the Council.

Job descriptions have been fully evaluated by HR and trade unions and that it is important that the Council is confident that they are recruiting people appropriately qualified at the relevant levels due weaknesses identified in the past. It was confirmed that there would be no compulsory redundancies and that the aim was to move from interim staff to a full time permanent workforce over time. There would be opportunities for staff to develop their skills and careers in Slough and continuous development was a key part of the approach being taken.

Lead Members welcomed the new structure in principle and recognised the importance of strengthening the finance department. The cost and affordability of the structure was queried and it was responded that the overall budget was within the amounts approved by Cabinet in 2022/23 budget and included in the assumption made in the Capitalisation Direction agreed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. The Cabinet specifically noted the comments of the Commissioners including the recommendation to move the payroll function to operate under financial transactional services.

Members asked a number of questions about the number of graduate and trainee level roles and the steps that would be taken to make Slough an attractive place to come to work.

In response to a question about entry level roles it was explained that there is provision for graduates and trainees and that there is an intention to have a defined graduate entry system to train and qualify individuals in house.

Questions were asked about the increase in the number of higher level posts in the new structure. It was responded that strategic finance managers would be allocated to each departments and would work with services more closely. It was considered these roles were crucial and that over time there would be increase in automation and the use of technology. The Cabinet agreed the

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proposed structure was appropriate for Slough in the current financial position, and that it may evolve in the future as and when the Council stabilised its finances.

The Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

Resolved -

That the restructure of services be approved, to consolidate them into a wider finance directorate, including the core operational finance teams (financial management and strategic and corporate finance), transactional finance teams (accounts payable and accounts receivable excluding revenues and benefits), a strengthened commercial services team and a new team that brings together financial governance, risk, insurance, internal audit and counter fraud and investigations and involving the following specific changes:

- i. Increased internal capacity in the commercial services team to replace services provided by an external contractor;
- ii. Increased internal capacity in the team covering internal audit to replace services provided by an external contractor;
- iii. The transfer of the counter fraud and investigations team into a wider financial governance team;
- iv. The transfer of the revenues, benefits and charges team into the finance department.

6. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Domiciliary Care Contracts

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report which sought approval to award contracts to 9 suppliers of domiciliary care which had been tendered by competitive process via the Council's Adult Social Care Dynamic Purchasing System. This would ensure a sufficiency of supply once the first tranche of existing contracts expired in July 2022.

In March 2022, the Cabinet had approved the re-tendering of two tranches of domiciliary care contract, which provided vital care enabling individuals with assessed care and support needs to remain living at home. The proposed award to 9 suppliers in the first tranche was an increase on the current number of 6.

The Cabinet considered and noted the Part II appendices without disclosing any exempt information.

Lead Members agreed the contract awards and discussed the lessons learned ahead of the second tranche of procurement. The main issues identified were mainly around communication and not being able to navigate the portal and the steps being taken to address these issues were summarised. The Cabinet supported to understand the blockages and assist

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potential suppliers with the procurement process to secure the best and most diverse providers available. It was good practice to provide training and ensure providers details in the procurement portal were up to date. Officers assured Cabinet that the Council had good coverage of different language speakers and this would be improved under the new contracts.

The wider market challenges were discussed and these included recruitment and retention and rising cost pressures and inflation. The work providers were doing with the Council to address these issues were noted.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet approved the recommendations.

Resolved -

- (a) Agreed to the award of contracts to 9 suppliers for the provision of domiciliary care. This will be to suppliers 1,9,10,13,15,16,19, 22 and 24. Full details were contained at Exempt Appendix A.
- (b) Agreed to the issuing of contract extensions and variations to existing tranche 1 providers who did not bid for new contracts, for a six month period until 16 January 2023. This would enable providers to continue to work with up to 155 service users whilst alternative arrangements are put in place, but not to take on new referrals.
- (c) Noted that lessons learned from the tendering process relating to tranche 1 would be built into arrangements concerning the tendering process for tranche 2 .
- (d) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults) in consultation with the Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health to have oversight of the mobilisation period and to be kept apprised of changes in the local adult social care market.

7. Procurement of Integrated Community Equipment Service

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report which sought approval to progress the development of a new model for Community Equipment Service jointly with the other Berkshire local authorities and statutory health bodies, led by West Berkshire Council. This arrangement aimed to support the delivery of economies of scale by drawing together the planning and purchasing power of local authorities and health bodies across the region.

There has been a s75 agreement in place since February 2015 and the Council intended to continue to collaborate with providers in Berkshire as they have done in the past. It was explained that the potential for savings was limited under the scheme as there were limited suppliers available in the area.

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Questions were asked by Lead Members and Councillor Strutton about a range of issues including monitoring performance and responsiveness. It was explained that the Council has key performance indicators for same day, next day and weekend delivery depending upon the item of equipment and the individual situation. There was a large store in West Berkshire and a local store in Slough that aimed to respond quickly to time sensitive requests. It was explained that more complex equipment may take longer and where there is work required to be carried out in the property they aim to get this carried out in 5 days. The reasons were equipment was sometimes delayed was explained and all necessary steps were taken to provide a timely and responsive service.

A Cabinet Member asked how the Council would ensure value for money, and it was explained that they were actively re-using and recycling equipment as much as possible. The Officer also noted that they undertake a lot of engagement for feedback which was shared with the Berkshire steering group and then fed back to each partner in terms of lessons learnt.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were approved.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed to Slough Borough Council working in partnership with local authorities and statutory health bodies across Berkshire to develop a new model for the delivery of community equipment services, led by West Berkshire Council.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director People Adults in consultation with Lead Member Social Care and Public Health, and Lead Member Children's Services, Lifelog Learning and Skills, to have oversight of the development process.
- (c) Approved the continuance of the Berkshire Community Equipment Service (BCES) Section 75 Agreement. (This is the vehicle through which funding between statutory bodies can be pooled)
- (d) Noted that a paper concerning the proposed new model will be presented to People Scrutiny Panel in Spring 2023.
- (e) Agreed that recommendations and updates concerning the re-procurement of new community equipment services will be presented to Cabinet in Spring 2023.
- (f) Agreed that recommendations for contract award for new community equipment services will be presented to Cabinet in Winter 2023.

8. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Extra Care Contracts

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report that sought approval to procure integrated care and support in extra care

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services. In January 2022, Cabinet had approved the extension of the current contract and the commencement of a new commissioning process to design a revised model.

The Cabinet was asked to approve the to procure Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care Services for a 3-year contract plus one extension period of one year each from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2027. The extension was subject to satisfactory performance throughout the initial contract period and that the contract is assessed as continuing to meet best value requirements. The pricing scenarios were set out in the appendix, which included exempt information. The Cabinet noted this in Part I without disclosing any of the exempt information.

The Lead Member highlighted that the co-production network had been engaged in the discussions and this was welcomed by the Cabinet.

After due consideration, the recommendations were approved.

Resolved -

- (a) Agreed to the procurement of the Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care contract via the Council's Adult Social Care Dynamic Purchasing System, on a three-year basis with scope for one extension of one year. This would be subject to satisfactory performance throughout the initial contract period and that the contract is assessed as continuing meet best value requirements.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for People (Adults), in consultation with the Lead Member for Social Care and Public Health, to have oversight of the procurement process.
- (c) Agreed that recommendations for contract award would be presented to Cabinet in December 2022.
- (d) Noted the pricing scenarios included at Exempt Appendix A

9. Draft Home to School Travel Assistance and Post 16 Travel Assistance Policies for Consultation

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills introduced a report which proposed to review its school travel assistance policies to enable the Council to continue to deliver its statutory responsibilities, improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and controls costs.

The policy had most recently been updated in 2019 but the policy had not been fully reviewed since 2016 and the system was considered to have inefficiencies which contributed to high and rising costs. It was proposed that the policies in the appendices to the report go out for public consultation.

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The Cabinet welcomed the review and consultation. Lead Members were supportive of the principles and commented on the importance of promoting independence, particularly in a relatively small borough such as Slough with a good sustainable transport options. It was noted that some comparator authorities in Berkshire were appeared able to contain the costs of transport and any lessons learned should be explored. In response to a question about the 190 beneficiaries of the scheme who do not have an EHCP, it was explained that these qualify through other criteria and that the EHCP was not the sole requirement.

In response to a question about the consultation process it was explained that the Council has identified a number of dates and will be carrying these out in different parts of the town in the day and evening to encourage wider representation.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved -

- (a) Approved the strategic aims to support deliver of the Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to providing travel assistance to attend school and colleges.
- (b) Approved the policies attached at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report in draft and authorise a public consultation to take place from the end of June to August 2022.
- (c) Noted that a report would be brought back to cabinet early in the 2022/23 Autumn Term for approval of the final policies, following consideration by the People Scrutiny Panel on 12 September 2022.

10. Improvement & Recovery - Asset disposals programme

The Lead Member for Financial Oversight & Council Assets introduced a report which set out the next steps in the asset disposal programme, which was a fundamental part of the Council's financial recovery. Asset disposals were essential to fund the Capitalisation Direction and reduce borrowing risk.

The report proposed recommending to full Council amendments to the Executive Functions and the Executive Procedure Rules of the Constitution to require decisions on a disposal of an asset via a lease at less than best consideration to be a reserved function of the Cabinet and to set up a new Cabinet committee to oversee the asset disposal programme. The Cabinet committee would regularly report and make recommendations for disposal to Cabinet via a standing agenda item.

The Leader emphasised that disposal decisions would still be taken by Cabinet and that the standing item on Cabinet agendas would be to receive recommendations from the Cabinet Committee. The Cabinet recognised the importance of progressing the asset disposal programme in a timely manner,

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whilst ensuring the programme was properly managed and followed good governance. The proposals in the report sought to support this approach.

Councillor Strutton addressed Cabinet and asked about the reasons for disposing of out of borough assets first rather than some in borough assets. The Lead Members explained the reasons which included the fact out the in borough assets were more complicated to dispose of as they may be operational sites or have been purchased as development sites. It was noted that a report on some Slough Urban Renewal assets was due to be considered by the Cabinet in July 2022.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

Cabinet agreed:

- (a) A report to full Council recommending amendments to Part 3.5 - Responsibility for Executive Functions and Part 4.4 Executive Procedure Rules of the Constitution to require decisions on disposal of an asset via a lease at less than best consideration to be a reserved function of Cabinet and to set up a new cabinet committee to oversee the asset disposal programme.
- (b) The Cabinet Committee – Asset Disposal Programme would provide Cabinet with a regular progress report on the disposals programme (standing agenda item) including recommendations for disposal for those assets that are deemed key decisions.

Cabinet noted:-

- (a) The process being followed in the consideration of asset disposals.
- (b) The decision to market the assets located out of the borough of Slough.

11. Bus Enhanced Partnership

The Lead Member for Transport & the Local Environment introduced a report which set out the general principles and core elements of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (“EPPS”), including a summary of the main elements within the plan and the related governance framework. The proposal was to submit the EPPS to the Department for Transport and to formally establish the Enhanced Partnership (EP) with the bus operators.

The Officer gave a presentation on the aims and objectives of the partnership to seek to improve bus services in Slough. He explained that the governance of the scheme would comprise of a two tier level of management, the first of which is the working group level where proposals are put together before being referred to the board of governance which is the key decision making and voting group. The voting was designed to be unanimous to remain

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consensus based and all proposals would be subject to feasibility assessments and funding. Slough had been awarded funding in the first bidding round for its Bus Service Improvement Plan, but the Enhanced Partnership would help strengthen bids in further rounds.

In response to a question on bus users it was explained that there was not currently a bus user group in Slough. The Cabinet agreed this was something that should be encouraged so that bus users had a strong voice and could contribute to the partnership. The Lead Member and Officers were asked to consider how this could be taken forward.

The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

Cabinet agreed:

1. That the EPPS be noted in particular the proposed plan and governance arrangements.
2. Delegated authority to the Executive Director - Place and Community, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to:
 - (a) approve the final version of the EPPS in a form to be submitted to the DfT,
 - (b) approve the formal commencement of the EP with the bus operators.

12. Exclusion of Press and Public

The Cabinet was able to conduct all business during Part I of the meeting therefore the press and public were not excluded from the meeting.

13. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Domiciliary Care Contracts - Appendices 1-4

The Part II appendices were considered and noted in resolving the matters contained in the Part I report.

14. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Extra Care Contracts - Appendix

The Part II appendices were considered and noted in resolving the matters contained in the Part I report.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.34 pm)