

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 19th December, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Swindlehurst (Chair), Mann (Vice-Chair), Ajaib (from 6.36pm), Anderson, Bains, Nazir and Pantelic

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Gahir

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Akram and Hulme

PART 1

85. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

86. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st November 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 21st November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

(With the agreement of the Cabinet, the Chair varied the order of the agenda to move the ICT & Digital Update down the agenda as the Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance would be joining the meeting slightly late and would then present the report.)

87. Approval of In-Year Change Request for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

A report was considered that sought approval for an in-year change under the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) for Slough Children First. The SDC was the contractual mechanism for making in-year changes to the contract sum and Slough Children First had submitted a request to cover funding pressures for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

(Councillor Ajaib joined the meeting)

The sum requested by the company was for £1.786m over the two financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 to cover demand pressures for the following:

- Costs arising from an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into the area (£650k).
- Pay award pressures (548k) to cover an award of 1.75% for 2021/22 and an average increase of 4% for 2022/23.
- Inflationary uplift for placement costs (£88k).
- Loss of public health grant (£500k). SCF had budgeted for receipt of £500k from the public health grant to fund discretionary services that supported public health outcomes. However, following a review, this

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would not be forthcoming and it created an in-year budget pressure for the company.

Full details for each of these areas was set out in the appendices to the report. Lead Members asked a number of questions about the requests including about whether provision for pay awards should be included in future budgets for the company to avoid in-year requests. The Cabinet concurred with the Commissioners comments that the in-year requests were for 2021/22 and 2022/23 only and should not be built into the base budget.

The Cabinet noted the update on SCFs wider financial position. The company had notified the Council that it had a £1.332m deficit for 2021/22 and was projecting a £4.939m deficit for 2022/23. The steps being taken to address the financial issues facing the company were summarised and the Cabinet would consider the business plan for 2023/24 - 2025/26 at the meeting in February 2023. Lead Members commented on the importance of making rapid progress on the funding and governance model for the company over the coming months leading up to the budget. The Director of Children's Services/Chief Executive of SCF highlighted the rising demand for services and commented that the development of an Early Help model was important in seeking to minimise future service demand pressures.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That a one off non recurrent in-year increases in the contract sum to Slough Children First of approximately £1,786k relating to 2021/22 and 2022/23, being £613k for 2021/22 and £1,172k for 2022/23 for the demand pressures highlighted in Appendix 1 to 3 of the report, increasing the 2022/23 contract sum to £33.565m, be agreed.
- (b) That the current in-year forecast losses be noted and that the Council's £5.000m working capital loan was being used to cover these losses, putting a risk on repayment of the loan, unless alternative sources of funding were found either via savings in future years, or a further in-year change request was agreed, subject to submission of a compliant and accepted submission.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills, to agree the final in-year increase figure, including releasing it on a phased basis for 2022/23 based on actual spend.

88. ICT & Digital Update – Progress and next steps for the proper functioning of IT at SBC

The Lead Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance introduced a report that updated on the progress of the ICT & Digital modernisation and remediation work approved by Cabinet in March 2022.

The modernisation programme comprised of 40 projects and it was expected to take at least two years to deliver. Progress on each of the following four key themes was set out:

- Cloud migration of line of business application;
- Cyber security and resilience;
- End use compute; and
- Replacing aged infrastructure.

To date, 7 of the 40 projects were complete with 25 to be delivered in 2022/23 and 4 in 2023/24. The ICT & Digital team had also been through a full staffing restructure and recruitment to some of remaining vacant roles was still taking place. It was recognised that it was challenging to recruit high quality IT staff in a competitive market. Key appointments had been made including of an AD Chief Digital & Information Officer.

Whilst good progress had been made overall on the programme, delivery had been slower than anticipated in some areas. The ability to recruit skilled interim staff had been a limiting factor. A significant amount of re-procurement activity had also taken place.

The Cabinet welcomed the report and the progress that had been made. ICT & Digital was a key area for improvement and Lead Members agreed that the report demonstrated that the programme was being well-managed and delivered. The report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the update to the modernisation and remediation activities being undertaken by the ICT & Digital Team and understand the ongoing risks, issues and challenges as the work continued be noted.
- (b) That the next steps on the journey to the proper functioning of IT, underpinned by an adaptive strategy that had a focus on appropriate levels of capacity and capability be noted.

89. Remodelling of Children Centres

The Associate Director for Education and Inclusion gave a presentation on the options for change to the Council's children's centres and early education and child care provision delivered from them.

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The Cabinet was recommended to agree that a six-week consultation take place on options for the children's centres, including proposals to reduce the number of buildings and reduce the amount of childcare provision being directly provided by the Council. Following a needs analysis and service review, the reasons for change were set out:

- The need to consolidate resources to enable Children's Centre functions to be renewed;
- The need to enable key Children's Centre functions to be fulfilled and focused on core Children's Centre requirements; and
- The recognition that resources and associated approach needs to enable and ensure the coordination and targeting of early childhood services at the most vulnerable.

The recommended option was to create a new 3 centre model by closing 7 of the existing 10 children's centres to establish a new model of delivery serviced by the existing centres at Penn Road, Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close, plus Yew Tree Road Early Education and Childcare provision. Commissioners had commented that rationalising provision was the right approach, but that effective programme management needed to be in place to ensure successful delivery.

The Cabinet had a wide ranging discussion on the proposal. It was noted that a majority of local authorities had already rationalised children's centre provision over the last decade as national priorities had changed. Early years was acknowledged as being fundamentally important and the new model needed careful consideration to ensure it could still deliver effective and responsive services.

The 3-centre model proposed as the recommended option would reflect the Council's future operating model and provide facilities that were still accessible to residents. Lead Members recognised the need to make savings and that Slough had an over-provision of children's centres with a universal offer that was not well targeted. It was also emphasised that the decision for Cabinet at this stage was to commence a consultation and it was important that people's views were heard. Lead Members expected to see a good and effective consultation process undertaken which involved service users, other residents and partners. The Cabinet requested that officers ensure the consultation was inclusive and was accessible to those with language barriers.

A report would come back to Cabinet in the Spring of 2023 following the consultation. Lead Members highlighted that they would require a full Equalities Impact Assessment to be carried out prior to taking any decisions on the future model.

After due consideration the Cabinet agreed the recommendation to commence a consultation and receive a further report in the Spring of 2023.

Resolved –

- (a) That a 6-week consultation on options for change to the Council's Children's Centres, including proposals to reduce the number of buildings and reduce the amount of childcare provision being directly provided by the Council, be authorised.
- (b) That it be noted that a report would be presented to Cabinet in the Spring 2023 for a decision on the proposal.

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

The Lead Member for Social Care & Public Health introduced a report regarding the procurement of an integrated care and support in extra care services contract.

The Cabinet had agreed in June 2022 that a re-procurement exercise take place for a 3-year contract from 1st April 2023. The Cabinet was informed that a tendering process had been undertaken, however, it had not been successful for the reasons set out in the report. Agreement was sought to extend the current contract term for 5 months to 31st August 2023 and to commence a new procurement exercise early in 2023 with delegated authority to award the contract.

After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That it be agreed to extend the term of the current contract with Creative Support Ltd for Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care for a further 5 month period from 1st April 2023 to 31st August 2023 at a cost of £353,417.
- (b) That commencement of a new procurement for Integrated Care and Support in Extra Care be approved for up to 4 years at a maximum cost of £848,200 per year (excluding any inflationary uplifts awarded) and that delegated authority be given to Executive Director People (Adults), in consultation with Lead Member Social Care and Public Health and the Section 151 officer, to award the contract to commence in September 2023.
- (c) That the revised pricing scenarios included at Exempt Appendix A to the report be noted.
- (d) That the learning from the case and the work to be undertaken corporately to address recruitment challenges be noted.

91. Department for Transport's Safer Roads Fund - approval for A4 scheme proposal

The Lead Member for Transport & The Local Environment introduced a report that sought approval to introduce road safety improvements on the A4 in Slough.

The A4 had been identified in 2016 as being in the UK's 50 most dangerous roads and the Council was required by Government to make changes to improve its safety. The Council was awarded funding of £1.7m from the Government's Safer Road Funds grant and this would meet the costs of the improvement plans. One of the measures was a proposed speed reduction to 30 mph on some sections of the A4 for which consultation had already been carried out. Complementary engineering measures would also be made to seek to reduce the number and severity of fatal and serious collisions. Other measures would include average speed cameras, red-light camera systems, road surface treatments and the removal of roadside hazards.

The Cabinet welcomed the report and commented that similar road safety measures had been introduced extensively in other areas, including London. The recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director for Place and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, to proceed with the statutory process to implement the speed restriction only for defined sections of the A4, having considered the consultation responses set out in this report and following consideration of any statutory objections.
- (b) That it be agreed for a further report in June 2023 to receive officer recommendations for final scheme design for other aspects to mitigate and support casualty reduction.

92. Corporate Assets Facilities Management Services

The Cabinet considered a report on the facilities management services for the Council's corporate assets.

It was noted that Bouygues, the Council's facilities management contractor had for some time been in dispute with the Council and they had triggered the contractual adjudication process to terminate the contract on grounds of non-payment of invoices. Instead of contesting the potentially expensive and resource intensive adjudication proceedings with no guarantee of a good outcome for the Council, Officers had decided it was best to end the contract by mutual agreement. An agreed termination with three months' notice, allowing time to put alternative arrangements in place was implemented. The report sought approval to implement a replacement model to deliver facilities

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management services to corporate buildings through a mixture of direct staff employment and direct contracting.

The Cabinet agreed that the approach taken to agree a termination was in the best interests of the Council and the recommended service delivery model as set out in the report was approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report and the savings required in 2023/24 against FM budgets be noted.
- (b) That the recommended service delivery model to transition from an external service provider to a new mixed in-house and contracted out model be approved.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Housing & Property in consultation with the lead member for Leisure, Culture & Community Empowerment to:
 - (i) Decommission the Bouygues contract including transfer of staff back to the Council where required.
 - (ii) Procure and award contracts to specialist contractors (e.g., lifts, air conditioning) ensuring that local, SME and other suppliers have the opportunity to compete.

93. 2023/24 & 2024/25 Council Tax

The Cabinet agreed to consider an urgent item on 2023/24 and 2024/25 Council Tax following the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) announcement regarding the permissible increases to Council Tax over the next two financial years.

The report sought Cabinet agreement to make an application to DLUHC for the Council to have the option of increasing the Council Tax above the referendum limits for the next two years. The reason for urgency was that DLUHC had advised that any such request would need to be made in early January.

The Government's Autumn Statement was published on 17th November 2022 and, for Slough, the threshold for increasing Council Tax was set at 4.99% from April 2023 without the need for a referendum. Local authorities could apply for a direction from DLUHC to increase Council Tax for a certain amount above this threshold. If that option was pursued the Council Tax Support Scheme would also need to be reviewed.

The Local Government Finance Settlement had not yet been announced and the implications for SBCs finances would need to be carefully analysed to determine whether any percentage increase in Council Tax above the

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threshold may be required. However, in view of the very tight timing it was recommended that it was prudent to seek the delegation to submit an application so the option may be available if required. It was recognised that DLUHC may not agree to such an application.

The delegation would enable the Chief Executive to submit an application, following consultation with the Leader and the Lead Member for finance. The final decision on the level of Council Tax would remain a decision for full Council when setting the budget. The Cabinet agreed the recommendations.

Resolved –

- (a) That it be agreed to approval being sought from DLUHC for the Council to have the option of increasing Council Tax above the referendum limits in each of the next 2 financial years (2023/24 and 2024/25) without a referendum.
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Section 151 officer, the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Finance, to submit an application to DLUHC in early January 2023, including agreeing the percentage increase in Council Tax.
- (c) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 officer, the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Finance, to design and consult on a revised Council Tax Support Scheme.
- (d) That it be noted that the final decision on any increase to council tax would either be made by direction of the Secretary of State or by Full Council, if the Secretary of State does not make a direction and the final decision on a revised Council Tax Support Scheme will be made by Full Council.

94. References from Overview & Scrutiny

There were no references from Overview & Scrutiny.

95. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in public without disclosing any of the exempt information in the Part II agenda. The press and public were therefore not excluded at any point during the meeting.

96. Approval of In-Year Change Request for Slough Children First Limited (SCF) - Appendices 1 and 4

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

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97. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Extra Care Contracts - Appendices A and B

Resolved – That the Part II appendices be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.31 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)