

Audit and Corporate Governance Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 14th December, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Kelly (Chair), Brooker (Vice-Chair), Ali, Carter and Gill

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Grewal, Naira Bukhari (Co-Opted Member) and Stefana Moldovan (Co-Opted Member)

PART 1

27. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brooker declared that he was a member of the Task & Finish Group looking at the Slough Children First Business Plan, Chair of the Finance Committee at Ryvers Primary School and Council appointee to the Foster Panel.

Councillor Carter declared that he was Chair of the Planning Committee.

Both Members remained and participated in the meeting.

28. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 28th September 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

29. Action Progress Report

Details of the Action Progress report were considered and the following comments were made -

- Adult Social Care Programme - progress update be provided on outstanding invoices and amount collected to date.
- Temporary accommodation (TA) – average of 54 days in TA and what the legal position was regarding duration of stay in TA. It was noted that there was no statutory framework regarding how long an individual could stay in TA but the quicker alternative suitable accommodation was found the better it was for both the local authority and individual(s) concerned.
- Referring to three over payments that had been made to staff, it was explained that appropriate action had not been taken and that this was being followed up with managers to ensure that it did not occur again.

Resolved – That details of the Action Progress Report be noted.

30. Risk Management Update - Quarter 3 2022/23

The Committee received a report which outlined updates to the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) Details of the main changes were highlighted as set out in the report and since the last meeting each of the risks had been shared

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with the allocated Risk Owner and Action Owners for comment and update. In some cases a meeting was held to discuss the revised position.

Referring to children's safeguarding it was asked whether the levels of demand had increased post Covid. The Executive Director (Children) stated that there had been marked increase in service demand, which was a national issue too but an increase in the complexity of needs of young people had also been a contributing factor. It was agreed that data relating to the number of cases pre and post Covid would be circulated.

A Member asked what steps had been taken to ensure staff were aware of the risks relating to cyber security and was informed that regular training was provided and updates posted on the council's internal website. It was noted that an update would be provided in relation to backdated invoices regarding the Adult Social Care transformation and whether the service was on track to achieve its target of £560k.

The Chair commented on the reported £6m shortfall in savings target for 2023/24 and was informed that work was ongoing to close the gap and that Overview and Scrutiny Committee were due to receive a report on this. In response to when the 2018/19 accounts were likely to be finalised, the Director of Finance stated that it was anticipated that the Committee would receive these in early 2023.

Resolved – That details of the report, including revisions to the risk register, be noted.

31. Slough Children First Governance Review - Update on Progress

The Committee received a report which set out a summary of the progress made on actions recommended following a governance review of Slough Children First (SCF).

There were concerns in relation to the financial cost of the services and whether the focus for support was appropriately targeted. The Council needed to ensure it was obtaining value for money and that SCF values aligned with those of the Council. The importance of adequate governance arrangements, to monitor progress made against recommendations, was highlighted. Members were informed that a Task and Finish Group had been established to specifically scrutinise and monitor the SCF Business Plan.

The Executive Director (Children) stated that the primary focus of SCF was the protection of children and delivery of a service that met their needs. The demand in service had increased significantly - nationally and locally - and managing that demand within the resources available was challenging. The latest report by the Association of Children Services Directors would be circulated to the Committee.

A Member commented that reassurance was sought from Commissioners that collaborative work was ongoing between the Council and SCF especially

given the financial position of the Council. The ED (Children) stated that there had been meetings between key individuals in the Council and the Department for Education (DfE) commissioner, as well as the establishment of close links between the DfE commissioner and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUCH) commissioners. It was agreed that DLUCH Commissioners be invited to the March meeting.

The report and progress made was welcomed but it was queried as to why no update was given on circa 30% of the recommendations set out in the appendix. The Principal Lawyer explained that progress made on certain recommendations took a little longer to evidence but that the Council had been involved in setting the objectives, as set out in the report, with SCF.

A Member expressed concern as to whether necessary measures were in place for the service to move forward and meet the needs of young people adequately, given that the service was rated as inadequate by OFSTED in 2011 and six directions issued in 2014. It was noted that Cabinet had recently approved a Business Plan which would provide the framework required to monitor progress and delivery of services.

Referring to performance management of executive directors and the chief executive it was noted that information provided by SCF suggested an annual appraisal would be completed at the end of the first year. Members were informed that the appraisal process was managed by the SCF Chairman and it was noted that the Chairman would be invited to the March meeting.

The Chair referred to the working capital loan given to SCF and requested information relating to the amount of loan given, repayment schedule and savings. It was noted two payments of £330k and £1.8m had been made and further details would be included in the next progress report.

Resolved –

- (a) That details of the report and progress made as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 be noted.
- (b) That the Committee receive an update on progress report at its' 14th March 2023 meeting.

32. Forward Work Programme

Details of forthcoming agenda items were discussed and it was agreed that the SCF Governance Review Update be scheduled for consideration at the March 2023 meeting.

Resolved – a) That details of the work programme be noted

- b) SCF Governance Review Update on Progress added to 14th March 2023 meeting

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33. Exception Reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

No matters were referred to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

34. Members Attendance Record

Resolved – That details of the Members Attendance Record be noted.

35. Date of Next Meeting - 14th March 2023

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 14th March 2023.

It was confirmed that an extraordinary meeting had been arranged for 18th January 2023.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.32 pm)