

## **MINUTES of Meeting of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, held on Tuesday 19 February 2025 at 6.30pm.**

### **Apologies For Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Dauhti, and Rana.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of Interest received.

### **1. Minutes of previous meetings**

**Resolved: that the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December as a true and accurate record.**

### **2. Launch of a task and finish group Regarding Support and provision for Young Adults, Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)**

The report was introduced by the Chief Executive of Slough Children First and Executive Director of People (Children), Director of Children's Services. The report proposed the launch of the Task and Finish Group on the topic of Scrutiny of the support and provision for young adults Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). This would have implications for the work of the People (Children) directorate which provides educational support services including support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. (SEND), SCF Business planning and monitoring as well as Corporate Parenting and young adults in care.

The DfE Commissioner had endorsed the proposal especially with regard to provision for vulnerable groups of young people.

The Committee were reminded that The Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 23-26 had been approved by Cabinet on 18 September 2023 and set out the shared vision between Slough Children First and Slough Borough Council where every child will be 'Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving'. The first of the three Strategic Priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2023-27 is that Slough is a borough for children and young people to thrive by providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.

The Task and Finish Group would explore the NEETS provision in Slough, and the role of SBC and other key provider and support stakeholders to better understand the challenges and opportunities they face in supporting those in each cohort of school leavers, that were NEET between 16-18 (and in some cases 25) years old.

The Head of Virtual School commented that the focus needed to remain on the vulnerable groups such as young people with additional learning needs and understanding how they could be supported with respect to education and work.

Councillor Hulme had suggested this Task and Finish Group, the Chair thanked her for the suggestion.

Members made the following points:

- Why was there a dip in Figure 2, Core leavers in NEET and what caused the dip from November 2023 to July 2024 before it started to increase again. It was reported that it was important to note that the cohort had changed from young people who had been in the cohort for a long period of time to those who were new to the Country and as a result there was a need to ensure the provision was there to support the cohort.

**Resolved: that the Committee agreed the recommendation to launch the Task and Finish Group as per the scope in Appendix A of the report. The Committee appointed Councillor Hulme as the Chair of the Task and Finish Group and Councillors Tomar, Ajaib and Matloob as the Members on the Task and Finish Group.**

### **3. Budget 2025-26 and MTFS**

The Executive Director of Finance and Commercial presented the report to the Committee. The report provided an update of the draft budget for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 in accordance with the Council's budget process as set out in the Constitution updated to include the provision Local Government Finance Settlement.

It was reported that it had been a difficult task, but a balanced budget had been reached. This had been reached by:

- Identifying additional resources to support the business rates position. The growth in the business community would give Slough a positive return of an additional £1m.
- The Service Lead for Regeneration, Housing and Environment also looked at the grant received of £2.5m which had assisted to address the challenges needed to deliver for 1 April 2026 as it was an implementation support grant and assisted to extend the food waste recycling across the borough.
- The Council had been advised by government that they could not go over 4.99%. All gaps on the assumptions had to be closed without increasing the council tax above that. The Council had reached part way without requesting funds from government as two service areas had accepted stretched targets. This was Planning for planning fees and Parking for parking income, by getting the best out of the service provision already there.
- The Council had asked government for £15.7m to help close the budget overall. The assumption for the MTFS was remaining as it was.
- The Committee had not received the Section 25 Personal Statement from the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial and Section 151 Officer, yet. This was the overall assurance given to the Committee that included the Risk Assessment and support to create a Corporate Risk Register which would feed into the overall assessment on whether Slough were in a financially stable position and whether the budget could be approved. The personal statement would follow shortly. The Leader made a statement that agreed with the Section 151 Officer. The Chair commented that it would have been useful and beneficial

to see the Section 25 statement to understand where the Section 151 Officer thought the risks were.

Members asked the following questions that the Section 151 Officer responded to:

- What time and capacity were given to the Opposition Groups to discuss the budget and/or an alternate budget? All Groups were given ample notices in December 2024 and again in January 2025 for opportunity to discuss the budget or an alternate budget.
- The balanced budget was dependent on the funds from government, what was the plan if these were not received? The balanced budget could not be achieved without the funds from government. Government had recognised that no more could be done in the time frame. If the funds were not received, a Section 114 would have to be issued as the budget would not be balanced. An honest and open conversation had taken place with government informing them of the situation. The government had been kept informed and there had been no indication that the support would not be available. The Council were on a downward trajectory, asking for less than the previous year and this would continue. The Council were working towards managing on their own. In the case of a Section 114 being issued, an all Member note would be sent out.
- What was the latest update on the food waste project? The Service Lead should be invited to update the Committee, at a future meeting. **ACTION**
- What measures were being taken for income generation? The Council had agreed a position on CIL and that it was not the direction that the Council currently wanted to follow. All Service Leads had been asked to look at their income and how to improve to reach full cost recovery. A further targeted piece of work would be completed on income generation.
- The improvement had been massive, and the Council were in a better place and Officers were commended for their hard work.
- Could an explanation be given on the £3.29m shortfall quoted in January 2025 and how it was met so quickly? The government was asked for additional support of £1.8m, the two stretched targets would accumulate 0.5m and other areas such as business rates growth..
- What measures were being taken to make temporary accommodation safer for residents? The Service Lead should be invited to update the Committee, at a future meeting. **ACTION**
- Could extra paid parking bays be added in town to increase revenue for the Council? The Service Lead should be invited to update the Committee, at a future meeting. **ACTION**
- Had the issues that put the Council in the unfortunate position been fixed? There was a full finance improvement programme in place. There were no ward specific funds available but there were budgets available for projects.
- Was there a figure for the reserves? A risk assessment had been carried out. The forecast was a £39.8m for 31/03/25 and £42.74m for 31/03/29. The Council were in a good position for 2025/26 but the future was unknown.

- Debt collection had improved, was this to continue, especially for areas such as asset sales? A new debt board would be issued so that all service areas could see their arrears in income collection. This would be helpful to Senior Leadership Team to see a single figure too.
- What were the three biggest threats to delivery of the balanced budget? The three biggest threats were the demand on the social care provision, the demand on temporary accommodation and the association with provider provision and the inflation and the direct link to the adult social care provision.
- Was there confidence that the Council could deal with any more challenges and was prepared for any more challenges? The Section 151 Officer was not confident, and this would be explained in the Section 25 statement, but the Council could move forward into 2025/26 with confidence, having mitigated the 2024/25 issues to date. There was a plan in place for the final quarter.
- What was the cost to run the Council per head in the local population and was there a benchmark for this in areas of service? The Council were in the process of setting up every area that was reviewed be benchmarked and then comparisons reviewed for unit cost.

The Chair asked for confirmation by email to the Committee on the government decision for the request of funds and thanked everyone for attending and their hard work.

Resolved: that the Committee noted the draft budget for 2025-26 and revised MTFs 2025-2029 and where appropriate, raised issues of concern and made recommendations for the attention of Cabinet at its meeting on 24 February 2025, when it would make its final recommendations to Council on 6 March 2025.

#### **4. Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be on 6 March 2025.

The meeting ended at 19.51pm.