

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 17th July, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Smith (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), Bedi, Kelly, Muvvala and Wright

Also present:- Councillors E. Ahmed, Ajaib, Dhillon, Hulme, Mann, Matloob, Qaseem and Stedmond

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor I. Ahmed

PART 1

11. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

12. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th June 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

13. Improvement & Recovery Update

The Leader introduced a report that provided the quarterly update to Cabinet on progress being made by the Council against the Secretary of State Directions issued in 2021 and the overall council recovery plan.

The report included detailed appendices of the progress reports to the Improvement & Recovery Board for March, April and May 2023 which were noted by Cabinet. The Best Value Commissioners had recently submitted their 3rd report to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), which set out their views on the progress the authority was making. The Leader expressed gratitude to the Commissioners for the support they were providing to the Council and he summarised the Commissioners comments to the report which highlighted the scale of the challenges that the Council still faced.

The Cabinet noted the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress made by the Council since the previous report in addressing the Directions of the Secretary of State be noted;
- (b) That the position regarding the Commissioners report and letters from the Secretary of State be noted;

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- (c) That the next steps to deliver against the issues raised by Commissioners and the Secretary of State as set out in the action plans and other workstreams that had been developed to address the Directions be agreed.

14. Approval of annual business plan for Slough Children First Limited (SCF)

The Leader stated that the approval of the SCF business plan was to be deferred to September Cabinet to enable more background work to be done to support the proposals and secure the approval of the Best Value Commissioners.

A Member had submitted a question on the report under the Executive Procedure Rules and the Leader agreed that this could be put to the meeting despite the deferral of the report. Councillor Hulme asked the Lead Member for children's services about engagement with community organisations and how the effectiveness of partnership working would be measured. The Lead Member responded by listing examples of the organisations that would be engaged and confirmed there would be a set of outcome measures so that performance could be monitored.

Resolved - That the item be deferred to the September meeting of the Cabinet.

15. Early Help Partnership Strategy

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval of the Early Help Partnership Strategy.

It was recognised that Slough needed to improve its approach to early help support through proactive, preventative partnership working. Improved early help support would reduce the requirement for more costly specialist services over time and enable communities to be build resilience. The strategy had been co-produced with partners and aimed to deliver a cohesive approach to early intervention and prevention for children, young people and families in Slough. The plan had been accepted by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and presented to the Slough Wellbeing Board. The strategy addressed some of the recommendations in the People Scrutiny Panel report on Slough Children First's business plan, particularly its workforce strategy, including the need to develop a shared language and performance metrics across the wider 'children's workforce'.

Councillors Qaseem and Hulme were invited to address the Cabinet and they asked whether the service had adequately trained teams in place to deliver the service and how it would become more accessible to those that already struggled to engage with Council services. The Executive Director, People (Children) confirmed that all staff in the service had their training and development needs assessed through the 1-1 and appraisal processes. In relation to engagement, the Lead Member for children's services explained a

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range of steps that would be taken including a communications plan, events, updated Family Information Service directory, working with the community and voluntary sector and through the new family hub model.

Members of Cabinet welcomed the strategy and commented on the importance of performance monitoring and alignment to the Council's emerging Corporate Plan which was expected to include a focus on children's health.

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

Resolved – That the adoption and implementation of the Early Help Partnership Strategy which would be overseen and implemented by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (Appendix 1 to the report) be approved.

16. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) updated Policy and Use

A report was considered that sought approval of the updated RIPA policy and guidance which covered covert surveillance and the acquisition and disclosure of communications data.

The use of powers under RIPA by the Council was rare, however, it was important that the Council had an appropriate and up-to-date policy in place. The Home Office Code of Practice required that the RIPA policy be subject to annual review and submitted to elected Members for approval. In addition to the operational need, the policy review provided assurance that the Council was complying with the RIPA legislation and provided the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) assurance that the Council was operating within the required legal parameters. The Council was required to submit a self-assessment of RIPA to IPCO by 31st July 2023 and this included confirmation that that policy had been reviewed. The policy that the Cabinet was asked to approve was set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Mann was invited to address the Cabinet and she asked officers to explain why there had been a three-year gap between reviews of the RIPA policy given the stated requirement for an annual review. The Lead Member, Councillor Muvvala, stated that the 2020 policy refresh did not go through either Cabinet or the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee as it did not contain any significant changes and that many of responsible officers during that period had now left the authority. He highlighted that the policy as presented to Cabinet reset the commitment to effective governance of the RIPA policy. The requirements of the IPCO triennial inspection were summarised. It was noted that there had not been in any RIPA authorisations during the period.

At the conclusion of the discussion the revised RIPA policy was approved.

Resolved –

- (a) That the revised policy and guidance be approved,
- (b) That the RIPA applications and activity during 2022/23 be noted, and
- (c) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to update the Policy as may be required, in consultation with the Lead Member, to reflect either changes in the Authorising Officers or relevant legislation.

17. Approval to Appoint Supplier(s) of DSO Vehicles

Further to the Cabinet decision of 17th April 2023 to test through competitive tender two methods of procurement of vehicles for the Council's Direct Services Organisation (DSO), the Cabinet considered a report that set out the outcome of the tendering process.

The DSO vehicle fleet was required to deliver a range of services including waste collection, waste disposal, grounds maintenance, street cleansing and minor highway repairs. The recommendation to Cabinet was that the best value option was to enter 5-year lease agreements for 32 diesel powered vehicles to commence in December 2023 and for 4 diesel powered vehicles to commence in December 2024. The current leasing contracts ended on 30 November 2023 and 30 November 2024 respectively. The cost of leasing the 32 vehicles from December 2023 was £368k per annum and for the 4 other vehicles it was £159k per annum. Details of the bids submitted was set out in the report and appendix, which contained exempt information and was considered in Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information.

Councillor Mann was invited to address the Cabinet and she asked what savings the administration would be making to offset the cost pressures arising from the recommendation and what steps the Cabinet had taken to ensure best value. The Lead Member for procurement highlighted that the report had addressed this and confirmed that in 2023/24 the pressure would be mitigated by deleting an unfilled post within the DSO and in 2024/25 there were various options for savings or additional income that would be considered as part of the budget setting process. The Cabinet noted that market prices for specialist vehicles had risen in recent years and were satisfied that the proposal represented best value.

Lead Members discussed a range of issues including the alternative options such as purchasing the vehicles outright. It was considered that leasing provided the best value to the Council and whilst electric vehicles had been considered they were considerably more expensive and in some cases not as well suited operationally.

After due consideration, the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Approved the leasing of 32 diesel powered vehicles from Company A for 60 months (5 years) at the new monthly rates set out in Appendix 1 from December 2023 at a total of £367,953 / annum.
- (b) Approved the leasing of 4 diesel powered vehicles from Company A for 60 months (5 years) at the new monthly rates set out in Appendix 1 from December 2024 at a total of £159,152 / annum.

18. Procurement of Temporary Labour Contract

The Cabinet considered a report that sought approval to commence the procurement process for a contract to supply temporary labour to the Council.

The current contract for temporary labour was due to expire on 24th March 2024 and a new contract was required to ensure there was no disruption to the provision of temporary staff. The Council was seeking to reduce spend on temporary workers, however, it did need a contract in place to ensure it had access to temporary labour to deliver projects which required specialist skills and experience as well as for roles where there were national skills shortages. The advantages of a contract included cost, efficiencies and access to a wider pool of workers with specialist expertise. The total value of the current contract for temporary labour was expected to exceed £70m over four years although the levels of agency spend should reduce over time as many areas were now able to recruit permanently to posts where appropriate. The contract had been included in the contracts list approved by Cabinet in April 2023 to be tendered in 2023/24, but this further detailed report was being brought to Cabinet due to the size of the contract.

Councillor Matloob was invited to address the Cabinet and he asked how the new contract would fulfil the new administration's election pledge to cut temporary agency staff by at least 30%. The Lead Member for HR confirmed that the Cabinet was committed to reducing the annual spend, which was currently circa £21m, and the Cabinet considered this to be too high. It was important to have a contract in place to access temporary labour to meet business needs, but Lead Members would be working with their Executive Directors to reduce the level of spend under the contract and bring it back under control.

After due consideration the Cabinet agreed the commencement of a procurement process for the provision of temporary labour.

Resolved – That authority to commence the procurement process for the provision of a Temporary Labour Contract, following the approval of the procurement forward plan submitted to April 2023 Cabinet, be confirmed.

19. Library 2023/24 Operating Model Performance Report

Further to the agreement by Cabinet in February 2023 that a new Library Operating Model be implemented on 1st April 2023 as part of the Council's 2023/24 savings plans, an update report on performance under the new model was provided to Cabinet.

The report demonstrated that the implementation of the new model had been successful and that the savings plan was on target to be achieved. All libraries had been open for their advertised times since the new model was introduced. There were a range of performance metrics and targets for the year, including the number of visitors to libraries, books issues, volunteers and events and these would be monitored closely. Library opening hours had reduced 36% compared to the pre-covid year of 2019/20. The targets reflected this figure, but the levels of activity had not yet returned to pre-covid levels. Lead Members commented that it was a positive start but that more time was needed to assess how the model operated over time.

Councillors Mann and Matloob were invited to address Cabinet and they asked questions about the statistics for broken self-service machines and whether future public consultations would use the model of that undertaken for libraries which had wide engagement with residents and a relatively long consultation period. The Lead Member for library services stated that all self-service machines were in operation as of last week and contingencies were in place in the event of breakdown. The lessons learned and good practice of the library consultation process had been shared across the Council and the Cabinet was committed to strong public engagement. The method, timescale and extent of future consultations would vary by the nature and purpose of the issue and any statutory requirements.

A question was asked about the accuracy of the attendance figure in the report for one of the events at Britwell library. The Executive Director for the service stated that the figure would be checked and Members present would be informed.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved –

- (a) That the successful implementation of the new Library Operating Model be welcomed.
- (b) That the performance of the new Library Operating Model which was implemented on 1 April 2023 as set out in Appendix A to the report be noted.

20. A4 Cycle Lane (Huntercombe Lane to Uxbridge Road)

The Cabinet considered a report on the proposals for an off-road cycleway along the A4. Concept designs had been presented to Cabinet in November 2020 and the Council had subsequently been awarded a capital grant of £10.4m from the Department for Transport to fully fund the project.

The scheme would provide an important facility to encourage cycling and walking which would contribute to a wide range of positive outcomes including addressing health and obesity problems, improvements to air quality, sustainable travel and safety. The report set out preliminary designs for the proposed route to extend from Huntercombe crossroads to the Uxbridge Road junction. The Cabinet was asked to confirm support for the scheme and give delegated authority to undertake public and statutory consultations and make the necessary traffic regulation orders.

The Lead Member for transport summarised the scheme and highlighted the steps being taken to ensure it was delivered within the £10.4m capital grant that had been secured so there would be no impact on the Council budget. The costs had been carefully assessed and approximately £2.1m contingency was in place to mitigate the risks associated with any such highway construction scheme. A project board was in place to identify and mitigate risks through a value engineering process to ensure there was no budget overspend.

The Cabinet welcomed the potential benefits of the cycleway and discussed a number of issues including the public consultation process and steps to minimise any disruption to residents during construction. It was noted that the majority of the works were off the highway which would mean minimal disruption. Lead Members commented on a number of specific design issues such as at the Huntercombe roundabout. Officers commented that the designs in the appendices were preliminary and issues raised through the consultation could be properly considered. The Cabinet encouraged good and regular communication with Members and residents on both the consultation arrangements and the progress of the scheme.

At the conclusion of the discussion the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Council's support for the A4 Cycle Lane and agreement that the allocated grant funds of £10.4m to the proposed approach set out in the report be confirmed.
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Place & Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for transport, housing, highways, the environment and environmental services, to approve the undertaking of a statutory and public consultation and following consultation, make the necessary traffic regulation orders;

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- (c) Where procurement is above officer delegation thresholds and is fully covered by the allocated grant, that delegated authority be given to the Director of Place & Communities, in consultation with the Lead Member for transport, housing, highways, the environment and environmental services, to approve the procurement and award of contract for traffic signals and design works.

21. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I and it was therefore not necessary to exclude the press and public.

22. Approval to Appoint Supplier(s) of DSO Vehicles - Appendix

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm)