

## **Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 23rd April, 2024.**

**Present:-** Councillors Shaik (Chair), Escott, Hulme, Mann, Matloob, Mohindra, O’Kelly, Rana and Stedmond

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Smith and Shah

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Khawar

### **PART 1**

#### **54. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Shaik declared that he would be joining the Cabinet with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

In view of the statutory restrictions on membership of the Executive and scrutiny some members of the committee queried whether it was permitted for a councillor who would be joining the Cabinet to chair and participate in a meeting a scrutiny committee. The Head of Governance & Scrutiny confirmed that as Councillor Shaik remained a member of the committee at the time of the meeting and had not yet joined the Cabinet he was able to continue to participate and chair the meeting. Councillor Mann acknowledged the response provided but asked that it be recorded that in her view it was not appropriate that a Member appointed to the Cabinet should chair the meeting.

#### **55. Minutes of the last meeting**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

#### **56. Attendance Report**

**Resolved** – That the attendance report be noted.

#### **57. Report from the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP)**

Members considered a report that provided an overview of the work of the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) and its key priorities during the period April 2023 to December 2023. The SSP was the statutory Community Safety Partnership for Slough and was a strategic partnership comprised of the police, local authority, fire and rescue, health, probation service and others.

The Committee was joined by SBC Chief Executive, Will Tuckley; Chief Inspector Ashley Smith from Thames Valley Police; and Sue Dicks from the Council's Community Safety and Public Protection Team. A Member queried why the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) was not

present. It was noted that it would not be appropriate for a PCC to attend a public scrutiny meeting during the pre-election period prior to the Police & Crime Commissioner election on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024. The PCC had recently attended an all member briefing.

The report set out the progress made by the partnership on its key priorities of domestic abuse, serious violence, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and substance misuse. A presentation on Police Data was given by Chief Inspector Smith. A summary of key points made during the introductions is as follows:

- A Domestic Abuse (DA) Partnership Board had been established to work together to address DA in Slough. It was a requirement to set up such a board under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The DA needs assessment carried out in 2023 indicated that the volume of domestic abuse incidents had remained relatively static since 2019, however, the number of crimes had risen from 2,614 in 2019 to 3,017 in 2022.
- The work to tackle the increases in serious violence was outlined. A preventative approach was being taken to address a range of crimes including knife crime, serious youth violence, violence against women and girls (VAWG), domestic abuse and sexual abuse. The SSP had approved a new Serious Violence Strategy 2024-27 in January 2024. The Committee noted the wide range of actions underway such as Thames Valley Police's Operation Cuba that involved a team of officers carrying out high visibility patrols, community engagement, stop and search, arrests and police response to calls. The police had 3 sergeants and 12 constables focused purely on knife crime and serious violence and the work was demonstrating excellent results with a reduction of 9% in violence with injury crimes between April 2023 to December 2023.
- The new Partnership Sector Tasking had been formed to tackle ASB and the group met regularly to focus on priority locations and individuals. A consultation had been held on introducing a new borough wide Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) that had shown strong local support. A report that recommended approving the new PSPO would be presented to the Cabinet in the near future. Members were informed that ASB crime and incidents had fallen by 17% between April to December 2023.
- A wide range of activity was taking place to address substance misuse issues including a Combating Drug Partnership and Slough Substance Use Partnership. Projects included support to rough sleepers experiencing drug and alcohol issues.

The Committee asked a number of questions during the course of wide-ranging discussion about the progress being made on the SSPs priority areas. A Member queried the assertion that knife crime had fallen in Slough and asked for more detail about the action the police were taking. Chief Inspector Smith referred to the work of Operation Cuba and the successful

education and community activity including the Knife Angel which had led to engagement with 8,300 people in the town. Members welcomed the Knife Angel project and recognised that it had provided a focal point for engagement during its time in Slough, however a Member queried whether it had been effective in getting the message out to the target audience of young people carrying knives and what the plans were for follow up activity. It was responded that a significant amount of work had been undertaken since the Knife Angel with a new action plan and regular meetings between the police and council with further plans to educate and promote prevention including more work with schools.

Members recognised the importance of joint working between partners on the priorities of the SSP but raised concern that there were limited opportunities for residents and councillors to engage in and influence the partnership and asked what channels of communication were in place. It was responded that a communications strategy had been agreed and there had been engagement on specific issues such as the PSPO consultation. Improving engagement and two way communication between local policing teams and ward councillors was suggested as a priority as was increasing public awareness about the work of the partnership and its effectiveness.

The Committee discussed the priorities of the SSP and Member highlighted that they did not include a number of issues that were major concern to residents including car crime and enforcement of traffic offences. It was noted that the SSP priorities were agreed after consultation and to reflect the strategic crime assessment. The Committee expressed support for the focus on prevention that was a core part of a number of the SSP priorities. A public health approach to tackling substance misuse was an important part of the strategy that the Committee endorsed. A concern was raised about how people with no recourse to public funds experiencing substance misuse issues were supported. The outreach activity taking place was explained and further information would be provided outside of the meeting in relation to the system of referral for those with no recourse to public funds.

Members asked a number of questions about policing numbers, responsiveness and public confidence. It was recognised that confidence in policing had been undermined nationally in recent years. In Slough, a proactive approach was being taken to improve communication, for example by releasing more information on arrests and the progress of investigations, where appropriate. Restoring public confidence would take time and require a significant amount of work with communities. It was highlighted that partnership working overall was very strong in Slough and that provided opportunities for effective future joint working to address the key priorities for the town.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee thanked the SSP for the report and noted the contents.

**Resolved –** That the report on the progress of the Safer Slough Partnership be noted.

**58. Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Annual report 2023-24**

The Chair and the Head of Governance & Scrutiny introduced the draft Scrutiny Annual Report for 2023/24. This was the first annual report under the new scrutiny structure that had been agreed by Council following the review and recommendations of the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS).

The CfGS had conducted a short review of the new arrangements to assess the progress and impacts since the changes had been adopted in May 2023. The findings were set out in Appendix B to the report and were reflected in the annual report, including an action plan to further improve scrutiny in 2024/25. The CfGS rapid review had concluded that scrutiny in SBC was steadily improving after a fairly slow start, partly due to the high number of new and inexperienced councillors elected in May 2023. There had been some important areas of positive progress identified including good commitment from most of the committee members, evidence of cross-party working and excellent support from scrutiny and governance officers. However, the Head of Governance & Scrutiny highlighted the key learning points and areas for further improvement and advised the Committee to continue its overriding focus on the Council's recovery and improvement.

The Leader of Council commended the committee for the work it had done during the year, including the task and finish group reports, and encouraged the committee to continue to provide scrutiny and constructive challenge to the Cabinet in the year ahead.

The Committee considered the draft annual report and, in particular, discussed the proposed SBC actions to CfGS recommendation 1 in 5.2.1 'Next Steps' relating to the CISC recommendation made on 13th March 2024 that a second scrutiny committee be established. The CfGS review recommended that the Council should "...resist in the foreseeable future any expansion of the scrutiny committee structure." The proposed SBC response in the draft annual report was to accept this recommendation. The Chair suggested that in light of feedback from members of the committee that this could be amended to refer work on the future structure of scrutiny to a future meeting of CISC during the year to consider on the weight of proper evidence. The suggestion was not formally proposed or seconded.

Councillors Matloob and Mann did not support this suggestion and expressed dissatisfaction that the agreed resolution of the committee on 13th March 2024 to recommend a second committee had not been put the appropriate body of the Council for a decision. They stated that the committee had made a resolution and that decision should therefore be referred to the appropriate body rather than returned to the scrutiny committee for further consideration. After discussion, Councillor Mann proposed and Councillor Matloob seconded an amendment the 'SBC Comments' box in the table on the CfGS recommendation 1 in section 5.2.1 of the draft annual report to replace the current wording with the following:

*"A spontaneous recommendation from the committee at its extraordinary meeting on 13 March was for a second scrutiny committee to be created to cover non-improvement & recovery topics. Noting the CfGS recommendation, this issue should be referred to the constitution working group for consideration."*

This proposal was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

No other proposed amendments were made and the Committee agreed to recommend the annual report to Council, subject to the above amendment.

**Resolved –**

- (a) That the Slough Borough Council Scrutiny Progress Report produced by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and its recommendations be noted;
- (b) That the draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23 as final, including the proposed response to the CfGS recommendations on pp18-19 of Appendix A be endorsed, subject to an amendment to the SBC response to recommendation one at section 5.2.1 to replace the current draft wording with:

*"A spontaneous recommendation from the committee at its extraordinary meeting on 13 March was for a second scrutiny committee to be created to cover non-improvement & recovery topics. Noting the CfGS recommendation, this issue should be referred to the constitution working group for consideration."*

**Recommended to Council –**

- (i) That the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 be noted and the progress made by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee be commended; and
- (ii) That the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee's response to the CfGS Recommendations (on pp.18-19 of Appendix A) be endorse, subject to the amendment as at (b).

**59. Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report: Resident Engagement and Building Trust**

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on Resident Engagement and Building Trust.

The task and finish group had been launched by CISC on 28th November 2023 and had been chaired by Councillor Mohindra. The Head of Communications summarised the key aspects of the report and the

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recommendations which aimed to improve communications with residents and councillors. Specific resolutions included an enhanced Members' Bulletin with more information on the wider work of the Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mohindra and members of the task and finish group for the report. The Committee then approved the recommendations that would be referred to Cabinet.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the committee thank the members of the Task and Finish Group, and the officers who supported it, for their work to produce the report at Appendix A;
- (b) That the report (Appendix A) and its recommendations (Section 4) are endorsed by the committee; and
- (c) That the recommendations a-o, set out in the Executive Summary (Page 3) of the report, made by the 'Resident Engagement and Building Trust' Task & Finish Group, be recommended to Cabinet for their approval or endorsement.

### **60. Vote of Thanks**

As it was the final formal scrutiny meeting of the municipal year a vote of thanks was proposed and agreed for the chair of the committee, Councillor Shaik. The Chair then thanked Members for their contributions over the year.

### **61. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was confirmed as 25<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.36 pm and closed at 9.11 pm)