

Council – Meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024.

Present:- Councillors Dhillon (The Worshipful The Mayor), Abbasi, E. Ahmed, I. Ahmed, Ajaib, Akram, Anderson, Carter, Chahal, Dar, Dauti, Escott, Gahir, Gill, Hulme, Iftakhar, Instone, Khawar (until 9.31pm), Manku, Mann, Matloob, Mohammad, Muvvala, Nazir, Naveed, O’Kelly, Qaseem, Rana, J. Sabah, W. Sabah, Satti, Shah, Shaik, Smith, Tomar, Wright and Zarait

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Bedi, Kelly, Mohindra, Parmar and Stedmond

PART 1

31. Declarations of Interest

None received.

32. To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Council held on 26th September 2024

It was moved by Councillor Hulme,
Seconded by Councillor Mann,

“That minute 25 (a) be amended to

- a) That the Council was engaged in activity to dispose of the Curve but no decision had been made to close the Curve.”

The amendment was put to the vote and there were 9 votes for, 18 against and 9 abstentions. The amendment was not carried.

The minutes were put to the vote and there were 28 votes for, 9 against and 1 abstention.

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

33. To receive the Mayor's Communications.

The Mayor thanked those Members who attended the events arranged throughout the Borough for Remembrance Sunday. The efforts made to mark these important occasions were very well received by both the organisations involved and the public.

34. Questions from Electors under Procedure Rule 9.

Two elector questions had been received within the relevant timeframe. In the absence of the electors at the meeting, a written reply would be sent.

35. Order of Business

The Mayor proposed, under council procedure rule 2.2 (b) (i) that the order of business be varied to consider agenda item 6 next - External Auditors Letter to the Chief Executive and Interim Annual Report. The council signified its consent to the variation of order of business.

The Mayor also proposed that normal procedure rules on agenda items 5 and 6 be varied, to allow the lead external auditor and lead commissioner to address council. The council signified its consent to vary the procedure rules on agenda items 5 and 6.

36. External Auditors Letter to Chief Executive on Financial Sustainability and Governance Matters and Interim Annual Report 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24

The Mayor welcomed the Council's Lead External Auditor, Julie Masci, to the meeting and invited Ms Masci to address the council.

Members were reminded that Grant Thornton were appointed as the Council's external auditors from 2018/19 for an initial five year contract. The first year of auditing for 2018/19 had been a difficult and protracted process. This audit had identified a number of significant matters across a number of areas of the council relating to inadequacies within the council's accounting records, absence of key documents to inform good decision making and weaknesses in core internal controls to enable the council to record and manage its financial information effectively. Consequently, three sets of statutory recommendations were issued to the council in May 2021, July 2021 and February 2023, which highlighted a number of significant issues relating to the council's financial reporting arrangements, concerns regarding the skills and capacity within the council, particularly within its corporate functions and finance, concerns around governance arrangements for group entities and arrangements for supporting effective governance and decision making relating to significant asset acquisitions and the council's long term financial sustainability.

The most recent letter to the Chief Executive provided an update on these issues as well as the most recent value for money assessment conducted covering the period 2021 to 2023/24. It was highlighted that a number of the key statutory recommendations made had not been fully addressed and there remained continued challenges regarding ongoing financial sustainability, quality and completeness of accounting records and wider financial governance issues. It was vital that the council took the corrective necessary action required as a matter of urgency to address these matters. It was recognised that the council had faced a number of challenges, including considerable turnover of the senior leadership at the council. It was also acknowledged that current officers were not in post when issues identified had emerged and were now tasked with rectifying the challenge.

Options available to external auditors included issuing a Public Interest report should it be considered that timely and sufficient progress on the recommendations was not being made. However, with a well established and stable senior leadership team in place now, it was considered that they be given the time that was necessary to focus on addressing matters raised, which included the introduction of a Target Operating Model and focussing on the immediate priority of the 25/26 budget. External Auditors would reassess the council's position at the end of quarter one 2025 and determine whether sufficient progress had been made.

Ms Masci placed on record formal thanks to the Chief Executive for his response to the letter, stating that she was assured that he was committed to taking the necessary steps to implement improvement. The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive were also thanked for attending the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee where they outlined the measures being implemented to address the concerns raised.

The Mayor thanked Ms Masci for her attendance and updating the Council.

37. Ministerial Statements on the Intervention in Slough

The Mayor invited Lead Commissioner, Gavin Jones to update council on the Ministerial Statements on the intervention in Slough.

Mr Jones informed Members that the Secretary of State had confirmed the intervention period at Slough, which was due to expire in November 2023, was to be extended for a further two year period until November 2026.

Details of the set of directions which the council must achieve and associated powers for commissioners were as set out in the agenda. It was highlighted that due to sufficient improvement having been made in housing benefits, the Commissioner powers relating to this had been removed under the current directions as it was no longer deemed necessary.

It was noted that in addition to existing commissioners being re-appointed, the Councils Chief Executive had also been appointed as Managing Director Commissioner and that this was a model that had been used in other local authorities under intervention.

The Council was required to operate differently to ensure it could remain sustainable in the future and the implementation of the Target Operating Model would assist in achieving this. A number of the directions specifically related to finance and included medium term financial plan, capital strategy, treasury management strategy and conforming to CIPFA financial management code.

A comprehensive workforce strategy was vital to create a high performance culture, focusing on staff development, retention and recruitment, to enable delivery of the highly challenging agenda.

Other key directions were highlighted as improving systems and processes to further support improved evidence based decisions and improving resident engagement by being more transparent and engaging with communities.

It was noted that the Commissioners would report on progress made on the directions in their next report which was due in April 2025.

The Mayor thanked Mr Jones for his attendance and updating the council.

38. Recommendations of the Licensing Committee from its meeting held on 30th October 2024

Air Quality Action Plan

It was moved by Councillor Khawar,
Seconded by Councillor Manku,

“That the Air Quality Action Plan (2024-2028) as set out in Appendix A be approved.”

The recommendation was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved – That the Air Quality Action Plan (2024-2028) as set out in Appendix A be approved.

Statement of Licensing Policy

It was moved by Councillor Khawar,
Seconded by Councillor Shah,

“That the draft revised Statement of Licensing Policy 2024-2029 be adopted as the Council’s Licensing Policy.”

The recommendation was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved - That the draft revised Statement of Licensing Policy 2024-2029 be adopted as the Council’s Licensing Policy.

39. Audit and Corporate Governance Committee: Appointment of Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year and related amendments to the Constitution

It was moved by Councillor Smith,
Seconded by Councillor Shaik,

- a) “Councillor Andrea Escott be appointed Vice-Chair to the Audit and Governance Committee for the remainder of the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

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- b) The Monitoring Officer's consequential changes to the Constitution, as detailed in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 to this report, be noted."

It was moved by Councillor Anderson, as an amendment to (b),
Seconded by Councillor Akram,

- b) That the proposed consequential changes to the Constitution, as detailed in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 of the report, be referred to the Member Panel on the Constitution for consideration, following which the matter be referred back to Council."

Recommendation (a) and amended recommendation (b) were put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved -

- a) Councillor Andrea Escott be appointed Vice-Chair to the Audit and Governance Committee for the remainder of the 2024/25 Municipal Year.
- b) That the proposed consequential changes to the Constitution, as detailed in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2 of the report, be referred to the Member Panel on the Constitution for consideration, following which the matter be referred back to Council.

40. Appointment of Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service)

It was moved by Councillor Smith,
Seconded by Councillor Chahal,

- (a) "That the decision by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to nominate Will Tuckley as a Managing Director Commissioner by letter of 20 November 2024 as set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
- (b) That the decision of the lead commissioner to confirm the appointment of Will Tuckley as Chief Executive, designed as Head of Paid Service, to a continuing period from 20 November 2024 as set out in Appendix 2 be noted."

The recommendations were put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved -

- (a) That the decision by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to nominate Will Tuckley as a Managing Director Commissioner by letter of 20 November 2024 as set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
- (b) That the decision of the lead commissioner to confirm the appointment of Will Tuckley as Chief Executive, designed as Head of Paid Service, to a continuing period from 20 November 2024 as set out in Appendix 2 be noted.

41. Appointment of Executive Director of Corporate Resources and S151 Officer

It was moved by Councillor Smith,
Seconded by Councillor Chahal,

“That the decision by Commissioners, following the appropriate recruitment processes having been undertaken, to appoint Ms Annabel Scholes as the Council’s Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer, as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.”

The recommendation was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved - That the decision by Commissioners, following the appropriate recruitment processes having been undertaken, to appoint Ms Annabel Scholes as the Council’s Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer, as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.

42. Quarterly Update on Urgent Key Decisions Quarter 3 2024

It was moved by Councillor Smith,
Seconded by Councillor Chahal,

“That the use of special urgency provisions used for key decisions as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.”

The recommendation was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved - That the use of special urgency provisions used for key decisions as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted.

43. To consider Motions submitted under procedure Rule 14.

A) Controlled Parking Zones

It was moved by Councillor Matloob,
Seconded by Councillor Mohammad,

“This Council resolves to:

- Halt the current CPZ implementation process until a thorough, transparent, and inclusive consultation process has been created.
- Establish a working group to review the CPZ proposals, considering residents' views and exploring alternative areas to roll out CPZs.
- Ensure the administration publicly acknowledges and addresses the concerns raised by residents, providing clear and evidence-based responses.

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- Investigate alternative parking and traffic management solutions as an alternative to CPZs in areas where residents are opposed to CPZs.”

The motion was put to the vote and a prior request having been made for the record of the voting –

There voted for the motion:

Councillors Ajaib, Akram, Anderson, Carter, Dar, Escott, Gahir, Gill, Hulme, Instone, Mann, Matloob, Mohammad, Muvvala, Nazir, Qaseem, J.Sabah and W.Sabah 18

There voted against the motion:

Councillors Abbasi, E.Ahmed, I.Ahmed, Chahal, Dauti, Iftakhar, Khawar, Manku, Naveed, O’Kelly, Rana, Satti, Shah, Shaik, Smith, Tomar, Wright, Zarait and The Worshipful, The Mayor Councillor Dhillon 19

The motion was not carried.

B) Armed Forces Covenant

It was moved by Councillor Rana,
Seconded by Councillor Smith,

“Slough Borough Council resolves that:

- a) The Leader and the Armed Forces Champion will sign a renewed Armed Forces Covenant, as detailed in Appendix A.
- b) This commitment demonstrates the Council's intention to go beyond its legal obligations by implementing the outlined measures.”

The motion was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

Resolved - That

- a) The Leader and the Armed Forces Champion will sign a renewed Armed Forces Covenant, as detailed in Appendix A.
- b) This commitment demonstrates the Council's intention to go beyond its legal obligations by implementing the outlined measures.

C) Best Value and Asset Disposal

It was moved by Councillor Ajaib,
Seconded by Councillor W Sabah,

“The Council resolves;

- (a) To update the Asset Disposal Strategy – to ensure all future disposals are sold via public auction
- (b) Council to set minimum reserves to prevent “fire sale” of assets under value,
- (c) To review its policy on recovering all past debt/rent arrears associated to the asset such as any sitting tenants/ occupants,
- (d) Will include monthly reports to Cabinet on progress of sales,
- (e) A quarterly report presented to full council, on all sale value achieved,
- (f) Notes the serious concerns of External Auditors in Asset Disposal strategy, asks the A&GC to undertake a full and thorough analysis of Value For Money and best practice.
- (g) In making these changes to the disposal strategy the council is prioritising a culture of openness and transparency.”

Councillor Mann moved, as an amendment,
Councillor Hulme seconded,

- (a) “To update the Asset Disposal Strategy **giving existing tenants first right of refusal. Where existing tenants cannot meet the minimum reserve level** to ensure all future disposals are sold via public auction
- (b) Council to set minimum reserves to prevent “fire sale” of assets under value,
- (c) To review its policy on recovering all past debt/rent arrears associated to the asset such as any sitting tenants/ occupants,
- (d) Will include monthly reports to Cabinet on progress of sales,
- (e) A quarterly report presented to full council, on all sale value achieved,
- (f) Notes the serious concerns of External Auditors in Asset Disposal strategy, asks the A&GC to undertake a full and thorough analysis of Value For Money and best practice.
- (g) In making these changes to the disposal strategy the council is prioritising a culture of openness and transparency.”

The amendment was put to the vote and not carried with 17 votes for, 18 against and 1 abstention.

The original motion was put to the vote and not carried with 17 votes for and 19 against.

44. To note Questions from Members under Procedure Rule 10.

Member questions submitted and replies received were noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 7.00 pm and closed at 9.37 pm)