

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 26 May 2022 11am
Council Chambers, Ground Floor Observatory House / Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Commissioners:

Max Caller – *Lead Commissioner (Chair)*
Margaret Lee – *Finance Commissioner*
Gavin Jones – *Assistant Commissioner and Head of Paid Service*

Members:

Cllr James Swindlehurst – *Council Leader (Deputy Chair) and Lead for Council Recovery, Forward Strategy & Economic Development*
Cllr Pavitar K. Mann – *Deputy Leader and Lead for Housing & Planning (attended virtually)*
Cllr Zaffar Ajaib - *Lead for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance*
Cllr Sabia Akram - *Lead for Leisure, Culture & Community Empowerment*
Cllr Rob Anderson – *Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets*
Cllr Balvinder (Beni) S. Bains - *Lead for Public Protection, Regulation & Enforcement*
Cllr Christine Hulme – *Lead for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills*
Cllr Mohammed Nazir - *Lead for Transport & The Local Environment*
Cllr Dexter Smith – *Leader of the Opposition*

Officers:

Andrew Fraser – *Chief Executive of Slough Children First*
Marc Gadsby *Executive Director of People (Adults), Interim*
Steven Mair – *Deputy Chief Executive & Section 151 Officer*
Richard West - *Executive Director of Customer and Community*
Sarah Wilson – *Monitoring Officer, Interim*

Secretariat:

Claire Willerton – *Chief of Staff to the Commissioners (attended virtually)*
Lucy Storr – *Deputy Chief of Staff to the Commissioners*

Guests:

Trevor Doherty – *Department for Education Commissioner (Children’s Services)*
Debbie Knopp - *Strategic PMO Support*
Graeme McDonald – *SOLACE support for SBCs recovery plan*

Apologies:

Cllr Natasa Pantelic – *Lead for Social Care and Public Health*

Meeting Minutes:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Max Caller welcomed the group and led introductions for new members.

2. Declaration of interests

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes and actions of the April Improvement and Recovery Board

The minutes of the April meeting were approved, and the action log closed.

4. Update from the May 2022 Finance Board

Margaret Lee summarised the recent Finance Board, noting that 18/19 accounts are due for completion by the end of May and that time was spent in the meeting discussing overspend projections for 22/23. She also made clear that she is encouraging savings from 22/23 and 23/24 to be brought forward where possible, and that the potential impacts of inflation have not yet been reflected in current numbers.

Max Caller noted that a substantive paper on the let estate and disposals work is due to the next Cabinet including the proposal for a sub-committee.

Cllr Swindlehurst expressed frustration that delays to the let estate and disposals work had meant that rental income may have been missed on commercial sites. Richard West confirmed that an update paper is due for July Cabinet on this topic, followed by a decision paper in September.

Cllr Swindlehurst also highlighted the challenges presented by overspend by Slough Children First (SCF); Steve Mair responded with an overview of ongoing work to determine potential savings within SCF and Slough Borough Council (SBC).

Cllr Smith informed the Commissioners that he would like to be a member of the disposals sub-committee and asked about how it fits into existing governance; Max Caller confirmed that it would be a Cabinet sub-committee.

Cllr Bains echoed concerns about progress on the let estate and disposals programme and emphasised the importance of bringing in additional resources where required. Steve Mair noted these and agreed that building capacity within SBC is a priority.

Cllr Ajaib asked if a log of existing contracts exists; Margaret Lee confirmed that building and maintaining a central contracts register has been a priority for the procurement project.

Cllr Akram highlighted the complexity of some commercial contracts which SBC holds and suggested including a high-level explanation of these when the paper mentioned by Richard West is brought to Cabinet.

Max Caller closed the item by confirming that Commissioners and the Leader will discuss how best to address Cabinet's need for disposals and let estate information.

Action: Lucy Storr to include discussion of how best to provide more information on the let estate/disposals programme to Cabinet in the regular Leader and Commissioner catch-up.

5. Improvement and Recovery Plan update

Cllr Swindlehurst introduced the item, explaining that he had been consulted on drafts of the plan before its finalisation, that he had asked Cabinet to read it earlier in the week, and that he was pleased with how it clearly sets out the narrative for SBC. He indicated that it had received unanimous approval from Council, and that a formal response should be expected imminently. Cllr Swindlehurst then thanked Gavin Jones and team for their ongoing engagement and for reflecting member comments in the plan.

Gavin Jones responded that he was grateful for engagement from the Leader and Cabinet and that focus now needs to shift to delivery. Gavin noted that this will be supported by Deb Knopp on the project management side but highlighted to the group that significant gaps in officer capacity and capability within SBC remain.

Max Caller welcomed the plan and its presentation to Council. He echoed Gavin Jones' comments on the importance of now delivering its content and made clear his expectation that an action plan will be in place with well-defined milestones and outcomes within the next three months.

Max went on to explain that SBCs position is relatively unusual as spend on services is comparable with its peers, and that its current significant financial challenges are instead largely due to its past high levels of borrowing and lack of capacity to finance this debt.

He outlined the challenging period ahead for SBC, emphasised the importance of recruiting and retaining officers to take the recovery work forward, and noted that close working between SBC and central government will be needed over the coming months and years.

Max reminded the group that the next Commissioner's report is due imminently and reiterated his commitment to sharing this with them when possible.

Gavin Jones offered to share an updated view of his intended staffing structure, noting challenges of recruiting people with the skills and experience needed to lead this period of change.

Action: Gavin Jones to share an updated organogram with Board members.

Cllr Mann asked for further information on next steps for the improvement; Gavin Jones confirmed that building a prioritised delivery plan is the next area of focus.

Cllr Akram shared reflections from recent discussions with officers, noting that more attractive staff benefits and the offer of London weighting from other authorities pose a challenge for SBC. Gavin Jones confirmed that remuneration is an area of consideration within the wider staffing strategy; Margaret Lee added that communications to SBC officers, members and partners will be key in the next stage of SBC's recovery journey.

Action: Lucy Storr to add discussion of communication plans around SBCs recovery to the forward agenda for the regular Leader and Commissioner meetings.

Cllr Hulme asked if some senior roles could be broken down into smaller, more manageable positions to aid recruitment; Gavin Jones noted that this is being considered where appropriate.

6. AOB

No other business was raised.

The meeting ended at 12:40pm.

Ref: SBC/IRB/05