

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 25 August 2022 11am
Council Chambers, Ground Floor Observatory House / Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Commissioners:

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

Members:

Cllr James Swindlehurst – *Council Leader (Deputy Chair) and Lead for Council Recovery Forward Strategy & Economic Development*
Cllr Rob Anderson – *Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets*
Cllr Dexter Smith – *Leader of the Opposition*

Officers:

Stephen Brown – *Chief Operating Officer*
Peter Worth – *Consultant, Finance Team*
Sarah Hayward – *Secondee from Croydon*

Secretariat:

Claire Willerton – *Chief of Staff to the Commissioners*
Jamie White – *EA to Gavin Jones*

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions – Max Caller

1.1 Max Caller introduced Sarah Hayward and Peter Worth.

2. Declaration of Interests – Max Caller

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and Actions of the July Improvement and Recovery Board

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting on 28 July were agreed. Max Caller apologised for not having been able to set up the workshops due to other demands on time and undertook to use best endeavours to get these arranged.

4. Update from the Finance Board

4.1. Peter Worth updated on the budget, noting that the budget gap still existed for 22/23 and hoped it would be closed by September. Margaret Lee noted her concern on the lack of movement on the overspend and that if the position had not improved by the end of September, she would consider taking a more active, directive role, such as setting up 'star

chambers'. Max Caller noted that it was also important that the service savings goals were delivered irrespective of the gap position.

- 4.2. Cllr Anderson provided an update from the Finance Board on 18 August 2022. He noted on the Council's compliance with internal audit that some agreed recommendations still needed action. He updated on budget meetings with Cabinet Members where he had emphasised the need for further savings.
- 4.3. Cllr Anderson updated that the DfE 'safety valve' negotiations had gone well and Margaret Lee complimented officers on their contribution. Cllr Anderson noted that the Council was on the road to a balanced position by 26/27.
- 4.4. Cllr Swindlehurst asked how the Council was going to improve the tracking of savings it had already committed to. The Board agreed a regular monitor would be useful. Stephen Brown committed to taking this away as an action.
- 4.5. Cllr Anderson flagged that it was more difficult for Cabinet Members not aligned to an individual department to focus on savings and that it would be helpful to provide Members with a three-page report on budget for their portfolio. The Board agree, Stephen Brown to action [*noted as an action*].
- 4.6. On asset disposal, Max Caller noted that Avison Young would be attending the Cabinet asset disposals sub-committee and Cabinet itself when asset disposals recommendations were on the agenda. There was discussion on the loss of institutional memory on the purchasing of many Council Assets. Max Caller noted his intention that all decisions on properties going to market would go to the Sub-Committee with a clear report on history of the asset, which would provide opportunities to utilise Member's knowledge. This would need to be part of the reports on those items now recommended for disposal which had missed the earlier part of the process.
- 4.7. Max Caller also noted that he thought it would be helpful going forward for the Improvement and Recovery Board and the Finance Board to highlight the specific DLUHC direction element that activities related to. He noted that Ministers would judge the Council on its compliance with Directions and that focus was needed.
- 4.8. Peter Worth noted that the accounts for 18/19 had been submitted and were substantially different from the original accounts. He noted that the finance team continued to have regular meetings with auditors. He updated on several issues which had been solved but noted that he expected there to be more issues emerging. He flagged that CIPFA was looking into the national issue on infrastructure, but that [this](#) was not a concern for Slough. He noted the DSG was moving forward, and that the deficit was increasing but at a slower trajectory than expected.
- 4.9. Cllr Swindlehurst expressed frustration that the Council didn't yet have an asset disposal strategy. Max Caller noted this was in progress but that the general advice from Avison Young was to release assets as soon as possible. Stephen Brown noted that Cabinet and its Disposal sub-committee would give members oversight.
- 4.10. Cllr Anderson noted that he had met with Grant Thornton recently, and that that Thames Water were conducting a study on excessive water use and had chosen Slough to do this.

5. Improvement and Recovery Plan Update

- 5.1. Stephen Brown updated on the Improvement and Recovery Plan and agreed to align with the Directions in future updates. He noted senior appointments had been made at the Council to lead the recovery, with recruitments in Finance, ICT, Place, Libraries and Public Health underway, as well as discussions ongoing with delivery partners about how they could help.
- 5.2. Stephen Brown updated on the Council priority for residents to have Independent and Healthier Lives. He noted that Public Health had a new team structure, that garden waste charges were due to start 1 November 2022 and that there would be a new housing management system in place 14 October 2022. He also updated that the Local Delivery plan was being reset.
- 5.3. On Children and Young People, he noted that Slough Children First had developed an invest to save business plan, that the LGA were due to peer review SEND and that Avison Young were reviewing the lowest cost workable option for office accommodation.
- 5.4. On the seven recovery themes in the Corporate Plan, Stephen Brown noted that the performance management process was being looked at, with a performance management session at every fourth CLT. The first Service Delivery Plans were due to be completed and peer reviewed. There was a need to get Assistant Directors in place for Transformation and for Strategy, and a Data, Strategy and Governance board had been established, scrutiny was being realigned to recovery plan and that an Assistant Director had been appointed to manage Customer Interface and Complaints.
- 5.5. The Group discussed Cultural Change, and work was being undertaken on governance improvement. Max Caller noted that more work needed done and encouraged Board members to read the Liverpool Commissioners report. He flagged that the Leader and Cabinet should lead on reports to the Board and supported training and development for Members and officers to enable them to do so. Cllr Swindlehurst agreed to meet Alex Polak to discuss training. Gavin Jones noted he the emphasis on culture was an important one.
- 5.6. The Group discussed work on Subsidiary Companies, where good progress had been made shutting down dormant companies. Max Caller challenged the 'green' rating on this and noted that appointed Directors needed to have right skills and training programmes. He noted there was a need to have an explicit shareholder agreement and a nominated shareholder representative. This work needed a formal report to Council.
- 5.7. Stephen Brown updated on accommodation, noting that teams were asked to imagine they had 30% of desk capacity across all office space and then to work out where this space could be located. Cllr Swindlehurst noted enthusiasm for moving staff closer to services. Sarah Hayward noted that recommendations were due to go to CLT. Max Caller hoped to see Members be proactive about different operating models, and wanted the innovative thinking brought about by COVID restrictions to continue.
- 5.8. It would be important for future reports to this Board that progress was reported linked to the specific Directions [*noted as an action*]. Max Caller noted that there were some Directions where significant progress had been made and the required report was progress made and others where the Council was yet to comply.

6. Commissioners Update

- 6.1. Max Caller explained that revised Directions were likely to be published on 1 September 2022.
- 6.2. He also noted that Mutual Ventures had been commissioned by DfE to review Slough Children First (SCF). Cllr Hulme had been involved and Commissioners had met the Mutual Ventures team. He hoped that their report would give significant pointers on SCF's future.
- 6.3. Max Caller also noted that he and Cllr Hulme were considering potential Director of Children's Services candidates to succeed Andrew Fraser at the end of his contract, with the aim to appoint on a minimum two-year contract.

7. AOB

- 7.1 None.

SBC/IRB/08