

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board**  
**Thursday 28 June 2022 11am**  
**Council Chambers, Ground Floor Observatory House / Microsoft Teams**

**Attendees:**

*Commissioners:*

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

*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*

*Officers:*

Steven Mair – *Section 151 Officer*

*Secretariat:*

Lucy Storr – *Deputy Chief of Staff to the Commissioners*  
Claire Willerton – *Chief of Staff to the Commissioners*

*Guests:*

Stephen Brown – *Chief Operating Officer*  
Cllr Christine Hulme - *Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills*  
Cllr Paul Kelly – *Conservative Group Deputy Leader (attended remotely)*

*Apologies:*

Cllr Dexter Smith – *Leader of the Opposition*

## Meeting Minutes:

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. Max Caller welcomed the group including Cllr Kelly who was attending on behalf of Cllr Smith and confirmed that all attendees had received papers.

### 2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. No interests were declared.

### 3. Minutes and actions of the June Improvement and Recovery Board

- 3.1. The minutes of the June meeting were approved and actions agreed, with Max Caller noting that the council's constitution had been amended to accommodate a property disposals Cabinet subcommittee.

### 4. Update from the July 2022 Finance Board

- 4.1. Margaret Lee informed the Board that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) safety valve programme has begun, led by the Department for Education (DfE) and offering support to Slough Borough Council (SBC).
- 4.2. She also updated the group on the contracts register work noting that positive progress has been made and savings identified.
- 4.3. Max Caller reminded the group that correct processes need to be followed to reduce spend for contracts based on unit price, flagged a potential issue with this within Slough Children First (SCF) and highlighted that controls such as this need to be embedded throughout the organisation. Cllr Swindlehurst asked for conformation of next steps.
  - 4.3.1. **Action: Gavin Jones and Stephen Brown to look into potential issue within SCF unit price contract and update Cllr Swindlehurst in their regular meetings.**
- 4.4. Cllr Anderson added that he had spoken to Steve Mair about ensuring that officers understand that they should look to reduce spend within existing budgets where possible.
- 4.5. Margaret Lee made the Board aware that she is not yet seeing significant activity to close the overspend for this financial year or make savings for future years.
- 4.6. Cllr Swindlehurst asked for an update on an internal workshop related to savings: Gavin Jones confirmed that it had taken place and that ADs and GMs have been asked to come into the office and sit together regularly to better aid collaboration.
- 4.7. Steve Mair clarified that the financial position of SBC is as reported to Lead Members in the last meeting, and the continued focus on identifying and delivering savings needs to continue at all levels.

### 5. Improvement and Recovery Plan update

- 5.1. Stephen Brown confirmed that the senior management structure has gone through Cabinet and Council meetings and that posts are due to be filled by the end of August, Finance and IT restructure are pending, and conversations with partners continue to explore more effective joint working.
- 5.2. Stephen also outlined steps taken to enhance ownership of delivery planning with ADs and noted that this work will be driven by the PMO once set up. He signalled to the group that work has continued on improving the SBC performance dashboard and that this and the performance report will be used to report to the Board in future, noting that both are a work in progress.
- 5.3. Gavin Jones highlighted the grip which Stephen Browne has brought to the corporate team and updated the group on recruitment. He added that the financial challenges facing SBC

are significant and that serious consideration needs to be given to how to effectively navigate SBCs recovery at the same time as running services.

- 5.4. Cllr Swindlehurst explained that members are aware of the challenges faces by SBC regarding officer capacity and capability. He also highlighted concerns that the leadership team is not representative of the community and instead is reliant on members to bring local knowledge into plans, and potential challenges relating to recruiting officers on fixed term contracts. Gavin Jones responded that he is attempting to improve diversity but fining the market challenging, and that he will follow up separately about fixed term contracts; Cllr Hulme agreed that seeking further legal advice on this would be helpful.

**5.4.1. Action: Gavin Jones to speak to Sarah Wilson about appointing officers to lead recovery efforts on fixed term contracts.**

- 5.5. Gavin also made clear to Cllr Swindlehurst that he is keen to discuss how to best address his concerns and identify next steps. Max Caller noted that Commissioner's share these and are committed to improving officer's interactions with members, and that the need for a diverse team needs to be balanced with the urgency of addressing the significant challenges that SBC is facing with experienced appointments.
- 5.6. Max went on to explain that ministerial changes have slowed progress on the first Commissioner's report, and his opinion that the recovery plan is unlikely to be deliverable at the same time as running all council services. He offered to work with Cabinet and a cross-party group of members to consider how services can be run differently to accommodate the need for focussed effort on recovery. Cllr Swindlehurst noted difficulties with this approach without a fully-staffed senior management team and without a coherent strategy. Gavin Jones flagged that the Corporate Recovery Plan is still relevant, and Max Caller highlighted that he and the other Commissioners have significant experience in running councils.
- 5.7. Cllr Hulme agreed with this approach, though noted concerns around officer turnover and local knowledge.

**5.7.1. Action: Commissioners to set up a working session with a cross-party group to discuss how to implement recovery plans at the same time as running council services.**

*[Cllr Hulme had to leave the meeting at this point.]*

- 5.8. Max Caller also suggested briefing all potential candidates ahead of all-out elections in 2023 to ensure that they understand the sale of the challenge before standing.

## **6. Commissioners update**

- 6.1. Max Caller formally noted that attendees had seen the Commissioners first report and ministerial response, including potential enhancements to directions. The council and members are able to formally respond to these during the representation period.

## **7. AOB**

- 7.1. No other business was raised.
- 7.2. The meeting ended at 12:10

Ref: SBC/IRB/07