

**Minutes of the Finance Board  
Thursday 17 November 2022  
10:30am, Council Chambers/ Microsoft Teams**

**Attendees:**

*Commissioners:*

Margaret Lee – *Finance Commissioner (chair)*  
Max Caller – *Lead Commissioner*

*Members:*

Cllr Rob Anderson – *Cabinet Lead for Finance (deputy chair)*  
Cllr James Swindlehurst - *Council Leader and Lead for Council Recovery, Forward Strategy & Economic*  
Cllr Zaffar Ajaib - *Lead for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance (attended remotely)*  
Cllr Dexter Smith – *Conservative Group Leader*

*Officers:*

Stephen Brown – *Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service*  
Marc Gadsby – *Executive Director of People, Adults*  
Steven Mair – *Executive Director Finance (S.151 officer)*  
Patrick Hayes – *Executive Director of Housing & Property*  
Andrew Fraser – *Executive Director of Children’s Services*  
Richard West – *Executive Director of Customer and Community*

*Guests:*

Clare Priest – *Central Contracts Register Project Lead (joined for item 7)*  
Paul Moffat – *DfE Commissioner (attended remotely)*

*Secretariat:*

Nasreen Brittain – *Executive Assistant to the Commissioners*  
Claire Willerton – *Chief of Staff to the Commissioners (attended remotely)*

*Apologies:*

Gavin Jones – *Commissioner*

## Meeting Minutes:

### 1. Welcome and declaration of interests (*Margaret Lee*)

- 1.1. Margaret Lee welcomed attendees. No interests were declared.

### 2. Minutes and actions of the Previous Meeting (*Margaret Lee*)

- 2.1. The minutes of the 20 October meeting were approved.
- 2.2. Margaret Lee noted she has an open action which is the rewording of paragraph 6.3 of the August 2022 meeting minutes – Margaret Lee will do this by end of the week.
- 2.3. Savio to confirm the status of work on Nova House and potential future disposal plans. Savio to speak to Patrick Hayes about this.
- 2.4. The Heads of Internal and External Audit to attend the FB meetings quarterly is being diarized.
- 2.5. Steve Mair to clarify whether 31st July business case deadline was met. Steve Mair reported that 88% have been received and are working on the others.
- 2.6. Richard to provide strategy review of SEGRO relationship and planned next steps over next 18 months to the Finance Board. Update is that work has started on this. Patrick to give full update at next finance board.
- 2.7. Value for money assessment services timetable to be confirmed by Steve Mair.

### 3. Budget Issues (*Steve Mair*)

- 3.1. Overspend is £7.3m in current year at service level but can be funded £25.5m reduction in the CD due to capital receipts profile. Capital Programme likely to slip a little. DSG to be discussed elsewhere in the agenda. Schools - 4 showing deficits. Settlement is likely second half December 2022. 23/24 savings -. Fees and charges paper to cabinet in December 2022. Looking at 20% + increase in charges.
- 3.2. Margaret Lee commented that for the current year the focus has been revenue and not much time has been spent on capital and HRA on both spend and quality side. Margaret Lee and Steve Mair to discuss this further. Scrutiny plans in progress, Children's is not going until Jan23. Margaret Lee asked, if the service are confident it will meet that deadline in Jan23 with good work having been done. Andrew Fraser said there is a lot of work still to be done on children's home to school transport. Not cited on how much will be received as there are additional targets but will be clear by Jan23. For children's centers, looking at reducing the number, this will go to cabinet in December. Margaret Lee expressed concern about this going into Jan23 as leaves little time for the work and papers and requested this be flagged as quite a risk.
- 3.3. Max Caller commented that there needs to be a plan for overall financial stability. The Council needs to be looking at a 3-yr timeline for planning purposes. Cllr Swindlehurst and Steve Mair agreed with this.

### 4. Internal Audit Update on High Priority Outstanding Actions (*Steve Mair*)

- 4.1. Steve Mair presented the update, noting there is a data cleanse being undertaken. Plan is to review all recommendations and aiming to have this completed by end of December. One school is pushing back on one report; however, these will be done by end of the year. 41 outstanding items remain. The IT report is overdue.
- 4.2. Work is being done on debt issues – records and not as good as they should be nevertheless, it is thought that £880,000 of debt could be recovered. Records prior to March 2019 are not available which may mean that £1m may need to be written off. Compilation of the internal audit plan for next year – risks register will be a key source of information to determine the plan
  - 4.2.1. **New Action: Steve Mair to double check whether the Council will have to take a hit on the £1m high level debt and update Margaret Lee.**

## **5. Disposals Programme Update (Patrick Hayes/Cllr Rob Anderson)**

- 5.1. Patrick Hayes reported Wicks will exchange Friday 18 November and £6.8m will be paid in. Azko Nobel is in the final stages. Good progress for year end.
- 5.2. Patrick Hayes Important thing is next stage and what we can bring in early next year. Will be taking some properties through auction in 2023. British Land are in discussions as to what they would like to purchase in the town centre. Prices are falling at the moment, but expressions of interest are coming in from developers. Prospects will need to be promoted properly and go forward with a phased package in 2023. Patrick Hayes is encouraged that the value is holding up. Margaret Lee asked how will we know we are getting best value re the BL issue? Patrick Hayes reported they will do a negotiated sale and market price must be met and will need to bid against others to secure the properties/sites.
- 5.3. Margaret Lee - Looking at next phase of the project, how is the link being made bet service design and assets being sold? Cllr Anderson reported the next wave are all 3rd party vacant or occupied, but not service assets. Are looking at office accommodation but that market is very weak at the moment. Will then look at services being affected by any sales. Could maximise value by moving people from one place to another. Stephen Brown said it is very difficult as cannot predict what will happen in 2-3 years' time. Documents are available on shared drive for all to look at. However, the Council is going to have an operating model based essentially on assumptions at this time, Stephen Brown reported. Cllr Swindlehurst said there have been discussions with cabinet on how we get the operations strategy bottomed out. The timing has shifted due to the office market falling and prices not being where they were. The work is joined up, Cllr Swindlehurst reassured.
- 5.4. Patrick Hayes will be to look at what needs to be done and looking at HRA assets as well. Cllr Swindlehurst was confident there would be a market in Slough going forward as there are still major housebuilders interested in developing and building new homes.

## **6. Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Valve update (Steve Mair/Andrew Fraser)**

- 6.1. Steve Mair reported Colleagues at DfE are content with the work that is being done. Whether schools can contribute to costs is being looked at. Steve Mair is meeting with Croydon in December to do a learning piece. Will do a dry run pre-Christmas on 2 December with DfE. Write-off will be around £27m and will be paid off over a period. Timelines: 4/1/23 draft of events to be done, will go to scrutiny by 23/1 and then goes to the DfE. If officers support it, we will know in advance.
- 6.2. Andrew Fraser reported good work and positivity from DfE. School Heads and DfE attended a Safety Valve meeting recently. The lack of school heads attending the meeting was disappointing, so doing some more comms around it to get better engagement going forward.
- 6.3. Margaret Lee had been concerned the timeline was a difficult one and congratulated the team on getting this far within the time se and congratulated the team on this progress.

## **7. Update on the central contracts register (CCR) project (Claire Priest)**

- 7.1. Clare Priest joined the meeting to update. The contract register is now being used as a business-as-usual tool. Are working on RAG rating on contracts. Have a flag for those that are not due yet, e.g. In 2027. Working with DSO to go through the principals associated with time management.
- 7.2. Claire Priest attended the London Procurement Network and met the Chair; found it very helpful. Being part of this group will help identify joint procurement opportunities.
- 7.3. Working with finance on Agresso and implementation by end of the financial year, basic version will be done and then will work to improve on it. The Board was complimentary on the work being done
- 7.4. Locating physical copies of contracts is ongoing.
- 7.5. Processes and procedures will be updated after full council on 27/11 and contract review is being undertaken as well with the new Directorate. Will report through to SLT.

- 7.6. Working with adult social care re opportunities for contract management using CONTROC. Margaret Lee expressed concern about going down an individual directorate approach for managing contracts, as one part of the organisation may have an issue with a supplier, but the other part using the same supplier is unaware.

## 8. Risk register

- 8.1. Steve Mair reported – CLT have been asked to review all the risks. Can table the actions going forwards if that is preferred. Will do deep dives on one or two each month. The full register is attached in the pack. Risk 4 – Margaret Lee said the risks here affect the council, except no 4 which is a risk to the residents of Slough. Margaret Lee wanted to know whether the risk to the authority is also understood. Steve Mair confirmed it is. “CLT should not be listed at the owner – it would be one person. Stephen Brown said this has been spotted and will be changed. Margaret Lee asked that the date when the target risk would be reached would be helpful to enable the Council to have a clear idea of its risk profile?
- 8.2. Max Caller - Risk 8 on pg27 continuity and planning risk (see the pack). Not much work has been done on undertaking exercises. These should be done regularly as it is a fundamental part of ensuring the council is working properly. The findings from Manchester should be looked at. This highlights a much bigger risk than the council realises and indeed needs to be pushed up the list of risks. Stephen Brown agreed this matter needs to be sorted out as soon as possible. Need to be very clear on how we will deal with an emergency if we get one, and agreed it is red flag. Cllr Swindlehurst felt it was time there was a refresh of the training as there are new members now who are not trained on this.
- 8.3. Cllr Rob Anderson echoed this and felt the Council does have good emergency service planning. But agreed every member needs to have good knowledge in case of an emergency. Andrew Fraser raised risk 5, temporary accommodation and whether we need to reconsider our provision of temporary accommodation following the recent death of a toddler due to mould. Patrick Hayes agreed this is something that does need to be looked, and there is also a need to stabilise the supply of temporary accommodation that is currently being used. Expensive hotels are being used for example, which is not sustainable going forward.
- 8.4. Regulation in the private sector is also important. Cllr Swindlehurst said the policy on temporary accommodation needs a revisit.

The meeting closed at 11:38

Ref: SBC/FB/10