

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board**  
**Thursday 26 January 2023 9.30am**  
**Council Chambers, Ground Floor Observatory House / Microsoft Teams**

**Attendees:**

*Commissioners:*

Max Caller – Lead Commissioner (Chair)

Margaret Lee – Finance Commissioner

*Members:*

Cllr James Swindlehurst – Council Leader (Deputy Chair) and Lead for Council Recovery, Forward Strategy & Economic Development

Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader of the Opposition

Cllr Rob Anderson – Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets

Cllr Zaffar Ajaib - Lead for Customer Services, Procurement and Performance

Cllr Nazir Mohammed – Lead for Transport and the Local Environment

Cllr Balvinder Bains – Lead for Public Protection, Regulation and Enforcement

Cllr Sabia Akram – Lead for Leisure, Culture & Community Empowerment

*Officers:*

Steve Mair – Director of Finance and S151 Officer

Stephen Brown – Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service

Sarah Hayward – Operating Officer

Stephen Taylor – Monitoring Officer

Patrick Hayes – Executive Director Housing, property & Planning

Adele Taylor – Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and Section 151 Officer (remote)

*Secretariat:*

Claire Willerton - Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Nasreen Brittain – Executive Assistant to the Commissioners (notes)

*Apologies:*

Gavin Jones – Commissioner

Cllr Christine Hulme – Lead for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Cllr Pavitar Mann – Lead for Housing and Planning

Cllr Natasa Pantelic – Lead for Social Care and Public Health

## **Minutes**

### **1. Welcome and Introductions (*Max Caller*)**

Max Caller welcomed colleagues and congratulated Sarah Hayward at being formally appointed as Operating Officer.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Minutes and Actions of the November Improvement and Recovery Board**

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting on 8 December 2022 were agreed. The action log was reviewed. Paragraph 4.2 to be updated to reflect that Grant Thornton would not give their formal opinion until February 2023.

**Action: Nasreen Brittain**

### **4. Update from the Finance Board (*Margaret Lee*)**

4.1 Comprehensive update on the budget was given in the minutes. There was still a lot more work to do some of which would be influenced by the local government financial settlement announcement on 6 February.

4.2 Internal audit updates were outlined in the minutes. Progress had been made in the last year, but it was from a very low base. The internal audit recommendations needed to be implemented, weaknesses identified, and mitigation put in place.

4.3 Progress was being made on the running of the Audit Committee. Cllr Kelly was the committee chair and had been in touch with Commissioners for guidance. He would also seek LGA support.

**Action: Cllr Kelly**

4.4 Dedicated Schools Grant – this was a very important piece of work which had been a success. The Council would receive £27m over the next few years if DfE Secretary of State approved Slough's request. Tony McArdle who had led the work on behalf of the DfE had been impressed with the Slough team. An announcement of DfE's decision was expected in February.

### **5. Improvement and Recovery – Progress Against Actions (*Sarah Hayward/Cllr James Swindlehurst*)**

5.1. The Board considered the latest summary of the recovery plan and the timeline for delivery. Recruitment to the Executive Director tier on the corporate leadership team was complete. Executive Directors were now reviewing their own teams, for example housing would have two new directors in post in due course. The 'Getting to Good' Board for children's services was led by Paul Moffat, the Children's Commissioner.

5.2. Scrutiny and governance panel meeting had taken place and the new approach to scrutiny agreed with the adoption of 'task and finish' groups and reports. The scheme of member allowances would be reviewed to enable members to attend the meetings required. The two published task and finish reports received very good feedback and there was a very positive feeling towards the approach. Resourcing it

was a concern, which was being addressed with more recruitment. Commissioners were pleased with what had been achieved so far and reassured that the Council would be able to embed it into their governance and scrutiny arrangements.

- 5.3. Timetable for deep dive work had also been done. Quicker progress going forward would be needed. Management tiers beneath the Executive Director level also needed to be reviewed, and the first would be the Assistant Directors' functions, job titles and performance management.
- 5.4. A shared set of values in the Council were being agreed. Regular rounds of staff roadshows were being planned to embed these.
- 5.5. Sarah Hayward reported progress on the recovery plan. Culture change work had slowed during December but she was confident that it would be back on track by February. ICT was progressing well and a report would be put to Cabinet in February or March. Sarah was confident that the work to develop the operating model was on track. Appointments had been made to the internal audit team since December's Board and there was increased confidence in the team's ability to do what was required and in the Council's ability to respond to their findings.
- 5.6. The Boundary Commission report with the new ward boundaries had been presented to Parliament and the new polling districts, stations and staffing plans prepared for May's elections. The consultation closed on 18 January and would be considered by Council on 26 January.
- 5.7. The external audit report of the 2018/19 accounts by Grant Thornton would be published for February's Audit Committee and was expected to be highly critical. Commissioners would consider how they reported on this to Ministers and what action they might take to report statutory officers in post at that time to their professional bodies. The 2018/19 audit would have a knock-on effect to subsequent years' audits until 2021/22 when Steven Mair and his team were appointed.
- 5.8. Max invited attendees to comment:
  - Cllr Smith asked about progress on filling finance posts. Steven Mair reported that he had held regular meetings with the incoming S.151, Adele Taylor, and that work continued to recruit deputies.
  - Cllr Ajaib had met Simon Sharkey-Woods and was content with progress on ICT.
  - Commissioners had fortnightly catchups with Paul Moffat, the Children's Commissioner. The next of these meetings which coincided with the next 'Getting to Good Board' would be expanded to allow Cllr Hulme to join.

**Action: Claire Willerton**

- Margaret Lee wanted to see how the Council would measure outcomes, especially on culture change and to see how these were monitored over time. Sarah Hayward explained staff surveys would be undertaken regularly in due course and that these would track progress.

- 5.9 Commissioners wanted to see progress on the Cabinet sub-committee to consider the activities of subsidiary companies (including SCF) and hold them to account. They were frustrated by the delay getting this established.
- 5.10 The February Board would consider each business area's budget and savings for 2023/24 and the lead cabinet members for each area would be expected to attend to present their plans to the Board. A timetable would be drawn up to enable them all to do so.

**Action: Nasreen Brittain**

## **6. Corporate Plan – Report to Cabinet and Public Consultation (*Sarah Hayward*)**

- 6.1 Sarah explained the work underway to refresh the corporate plan and consult residents. The timetable was challenging given the forthcoming elections and the period of sensitivity beforehand. Commissioners would offer briefing to all candidates standing in May to ensure they understood the situation at the Council. Margaret emphasised again the importance of consulting residents and using their feedback as a benchmark – e.g. on customer services.
- 6.2 Sarah would report on progress at the March Board.

**Action: Sarah Hayward**

## **7. HR Function – review of structure and processes, including deliverables and timetable (*Sarah Hayward/Cllr Swindlehurst*)**

- 7.1 Commissioners continued to be concerned at the lack of progress since this Direction was imposed in September 2022. The HR function at the Council required a full service review. Margaret observed that for the Council to succeed, its HR function had to be fit for purpose. Cllr Akram suggested that the Council could learn from other organisations and that other local authorities had addressed the problems Slough faced successfully. Max wanted to see the transformation and culture change accelerated and asked Stephen Brown and Sarah Hayward to prioritise this and to provide a full report to Cabinet as a matter of urgency.

**Action: Stephen Brown and Sarah Hayward**

## **8. Commissioners Update:**

### **8.1 Commissioners' Council Tax Letter to Minister Rowley MP**

- 8.1.1 Max shared Commissioners letter with the Board. Ministers' decision would be announced with the local government settlement on 6 February. Ministers would be concerned about the impact of council tax increases for residents during the current cost of living crisis. Cllr Swindlehurst felt there was no alternative for the Council. It was better to build the base now as it would go towards getting the Council out of the difficulty it found itself in. Trust in the Council had eroded however and would need to be built back up.

**8.2 Commissioners' second report to Minister Rowley MP (Max Caller)**

**8.2.1** Max shared the Commissioners' report with the Board. It would be published in due course on gov.uk with the Minister's response.

**9. AOB**

None.

The meeting closed at 11am.

Ref: SBC/IRB/12

APPROVED