

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 25 May 2023**

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Thursday 25 May 9.30am
Council Chambers, Observatory House**

Attendees:

Commissioners:

Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner (Chair)
Denise Murray – Finance Commissioner
Gerard Curran - Commissioner

Members:

Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader of the Opposition with responsibility for Improvement and Recovery

Officers:

Stephen Brown, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Services
Adele Taylor – Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and S151 Officer
Sarah Hayward – Operating Officer
Stephen Taylor – Monitoring Officer
Sue Butcher – Executive Director, Children’s Services
Richard West – Executive Director, Place & Communities
Dean Tyler – Associate Director of Strategy & Insight
Tony Wisken – Associate Director of Transformation

Secretariat:

Nasreen Brittain – Executive Assistant to the Commissioners (minutes)
Claire Willerton - Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Apologies:

Sean Nolan, Acting Finance Commissioner
Cllr Pavitar Mann, Leader of the Opposition
Cllr Wal Chahal Deputy Leader and Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets
Cllr Paul Kelly – Lead for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning and Skills
Patrick Hayes – Executive Director Housing, property & Planning
Simon Sharkey Woods - AD Chief Digital & Information Officer
Marc Gatsby – Executive Director, People – Adults

Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions (*Gavin Jones*)

New Commissioners Denise Murray and Gerard Curran welcomed. Leader Cllr Smith welcomed as the new Leader of the Council.

2. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest made.

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

3.1 Minutes noted for Improvement and Recovery Board approved. Gavin Jones reiterated the importance of all actions being updated within the new timeframe set by Commissioners, as the deadline was missed for this month's board. Actions to be updated two weeks before each board. Stephen Brown would reinforce this important message back to CLT and ensure this happened going forward. Stephen Taylor updated on his action on Member Casework (**action 27.4.23.7.2**). He has asked for this to be monitored and receive regular updates so can see how things are improving. There was a very large number in the backlog of casework which he would address. The action as recorded was now closed.

4. Commissioner Update (*Gavin Jones*)

4.1 Next Phase of Intervention

- 4.1.1** New Commissioner team now in place. Commissioners wanted to create an environment where the Council was able to ask for assistance.
- 4.1.2** Gavin Jones commented that in time and as part of the demonstration of the recovery, there will be an expectation that the Leader will speak more about the recovery and show ownership of it.
- 4.1.3** Over a period of time, will take a view of where the focus will be for each Commissioner.
- 4.1.4** The next deliverable is the letter to the Minister, which is due in June. There is a first draft in progress. Commissioners will wait for a little longer to allow the new Administration to bed in. Will share the initial thoughts with the Council. End of June the final version of the letter ought to be ready to send to the Minister.

4.2 Update from the Finance Board on 18 May 2023 (*Gavin Jones/Adele Taylor*)

- 4.2.1** Jim Taylor's diagnostic report went beyond finance only. Adele Taylor updated that most important thing was to go through where the improvement actions were happening and what the next actions were coming up. Discussed capacity and recruitment. Discussed Internal Audit and updated on progress on prior year actions around key financial systems. Discussed outturn and where the Council was with this. Currently in the middle of doing budget monitoring for period two. Too early for AT to say at the moment but would have a clearer view in another week's time. AT trying to get a clearer picture of what the actual centrally held budgets are.
- 4.2.2** Gerard Curran asked about the Audit Committee. Adele Taylor responded there was a meeting scheduled for 7 June, but the goal was to provide a bespoke training plan for **all** Members throughout the year. Gerard Curran concerned the work may be too generic, but Adele Taylor reassured this was not the case. There was a wrap around with the two DD S151s, the Internal Audit Lead and Democratic Services.

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- 4.2.3 Denise Murray reflected the new Lead for Internal Audit was new to local government and wanted to see training and development to be provided. She also wanted to go through the savings in much greater detail (line by line) but was happy to do this separately with Adele Taylor.
- 4.2.4 Adele Taylor reflected that period 9 was the last time budget monitoring was carried out at SBC. So, starting from a very low base.
- 4.2.5 Stephen Taylor met with the Chair of Audit Committee, Cllr Paul Kelly, and a further session was being arranged to go into things in more detail.
- 4.2.6 Gavin asked if anything was scheduled with Lead Members and EDs to ensure there was understanding and ownership of their portfolios. They would come and present at the IRBs when required/necessary. This tied in well with the Council 'owning' the recovery.
- 4.2.7 The Leader received a letter from Minister Lee Rowley, who expressed concern there was no medium term financial plan. Reassurance would need to be given to the Minister. Denise Murray and Adele Taylor confirmed this was on the Improvement Plan although it wasn't a 'traditional' medium term financial plan. Adele Taylor would respond once she had had the opportunity to see the letter and would work with Denise Murray on it.

5. Progress Update on Improvement (Sarah Hayward)

5.1 Review of Recovery Plan and progress against directions

- 5.1.1 How the Council reported to the Commissioners remained a live conversation. Each direction had a rag status next to it. Sarah Hayward updated the Board that they have established a Recovery Board as a new initiative which will meet monthly. The red, amber, green ratings indicate whether an item is on track to be delivered, it doesn't mean they have been delivered. There is also narrative to explain each one. Sarah also confirmed that the Corporate Performance Report was provided each month at the IRB and was a work in progress. How reporting would done will be followed up.
- 5.1.2 Gavin Jones commented that the key issue was the capacity to deliver against the plan as it stood. Sarah Hayward agreed and reflected on the example of the Children's Services Report that was produced for the cabinet on 25 May. It took a great deal of work by staff and a lot of extra hours of their own time, which was not sustainable going forwards. Stephen Brown was keen to know what the Commissioners' focus was so that they could align the CLT's focus to that as well. it was not going to be possible to undertake all the items at once due to the lack of resource. To drive the pace of change, needed capacity at the right levels to be able to deliver. A performance management framework was also key. Stephen Brown informed the meeting that there was a CLT Away Day planned for Culture Change and the focus would be on what the main differences were that the Senior Team wanted to see in the organisation. Stephen Brown wanted the new structure to complete this summer with a new Corporate Plan. Gavin Jones reiterated that the Commissioners had confidence that the Council had built the right capacity in to deliver the changes required.
- 5.1.3 Denise Murray wanted an update on risk, and where was it embedded. Resources and capacity had been highlighted, but what were the others? Culture Change had a programme against it, and with the new Board, would give more time for strategic

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thought. Improvements in areas were also included in the risk slides which Sarah Hayward would circulate as they were not provided in the pack.

- 5.1.4 Stephen Taylor expressed concern about the Members' ability to contribute to this work. There were twenty two new members, with 16 new Conservative members. To make scrutiny work and enable new Members to get up to speed, assurance was needed there would be a drive that Members would indeed contribute to the overall recovery of the Council. Monitoring of Member involved as well as the Officers would be essential. Gavin Jones responded that this was very important in order to keep scrutiny working properly, as the danger with a new political administration being in place was that scrutiny suffered, this was not something the Council could allow. Sarah Hayward responded that the officers saw everything through the paradigm of the improvement issue. Members, however, did not necessarily understand this and would need to be guided very closely to enable them to comprehend the complex issues the Council faced.
- 5.1.5 Leader reflected that there was a real desire from the new Administration to do the hard work required to assist the Council's recovery. Commissioners were keen for the Chairs of the Committees take up the LGA training being offered and would be interested in seeing how this developed.
- 5.1.6 Commissioners would challenge the organisation in a robust but cooperative way. Gerard Curran to have further discussions with Stephen Brown on the restructure and messaging of the same. On the point of the new Members, he felt every risk was also an opportunity and there was a lot of energy from the new members which could be harnessed more positively. Gerard Curran reflected he wanted to see more on Mutual Ventures work and the budgeting around Children's Services. On performance data, he felt that responsibility should be accepted for the reasons behind any failings, for example customer services waiting times for answering phone calls should not be blamed on the elections or the council tax rise, resulting in larger volume of calls to the council, as both were entirely predictable.

5.2 Programme/Project Management

- 5.2.1 SBC had corporately supported project management. People kept track of things and ensured they were happening. There was a business planning manager who had been doing the overarching work. This was a concern for Gavin Jones, as the capability was not robust enough to deliver. Business Support was taken out of the organisation in the Our Futures restructure. PA support for example had been depleted and while it urgently needed to be put back in, resource was a limiting factor. Prioritisation of where to allocate resource was linked into the Intervention. Denise Murray was not clear how the core projects were supported and directed to enable delivery. Prioritisation needed to take place to focus on the areas and the order in which work happened. Stephen Brown welcomed this.

Action: Nasreen Brittain to arrange for Commissioners to have a further conversation with Sarah Hayward about prioritisation of work and the order in which it happened.

6. Deep Dive Slough Children's First (Sue Butcher)

6.1 Deliverability: Biggest challenge is in Children's Services. In terms of deliverability Sue Butcher still finding out what people are doing. There is a shifting of culture required at SBC as there is resource that is not used as efficiently as it could be. Championing of practice is an area of focus. Managing projects and following up with people, role modelling the right behaviours e.g. meeting deadlines. Staffing, there are sufficient social workers with sufficient caseload balance. Efficient and effective working, redeploying resources and project managing. AD portfolio is not felt to be too large. Heads of Service need to operate at that level and become more strategic. On the education side, need to get Group Managers to become Heads of Service. Stephen Brown wanted feedback from the Commissioners on the restructure as it was being worked through.

6.2 Sue Butcher updated the Board on Slough Children's First (SCF). She stressed it was very important that this was a children's service. The mindset now was much more about moving forwards.

6.3 Strategic Approach:

6.3.1 Sue had moved the focus onto children, who were becoming much more prominent in the discussions that were taking place.

6.4 Business and Improvement Plan:

6.4.1 Sue Butcher updated that this would be going to the Corporate Board and then to Cabinet in June. It was a business and improvement plan so would look different to the previous plan. OFSTED graded the Service as RI (requires improvement). Directly after the OFSTED inspection a 12-week improvement plan was put in place which was presented at the Getting to Good Board for the DfE Commissioner. The business plan was subject to complex governance arrangements. There were a lot of mechanisms to go through. Would need to be strategic about the governance.

6.4.2 Staff engagement about the values included weekly briefings with all staff across children's services where staff were invited to submit comments. The word 'love' had been brought into the conversation. Trust needed to be redeveloped with young people. New roles that had been finalised included Paul Moffat appointed interim SCF Chair for 3 months following the departure of Tony Hunter who stood down on 10 March 2023. The Company appointed Stephen Mason Non-Executive Chair (Council Representative).

6.4.3 There were pockets of good practice, however.

6.4.4 SEND: have now have a strategic direction. Sue Butcher wanted to share that the progress made over the last 3 months had been very positive. Wanted to work closely with the team to ensure they continued with this good work going forward. This was also in Paul Moffat's portfolio.

6.4.5 OFSTED would return later in the year to do a focussed inspection. Sue Butcher and the team were already working on this.

6.4.6 Very pleased have got Front Line. Very pleased about staff comments which were much more positive.

6.4.7 On recruitment, Sue reported that currently there were 23% of agency staff, which was a reduction on previous figures. Some areas no longer needed agency staff, which was a good improvement. Sue was pleased with the changes in this area. Hampshire County Council would also be providing some mentoring with the Heads of Service.

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- 6.4.8 Sue observed that the workforce did not reflect the population all that well. Commissioners commented they were concerned about this being the case.
- 6.4.9 Audit needed to be more robust, and there was now a framework for this.
- 6.4.10 Compliance remained an issue.
- 6.4.11 The 'Staying Close' bid was not awarded but the bid itself had received praise.
- 6.4.12 Sue Butcher reflected that overall she was very happy with the work being done with her teams.
- 6.4.13 Gavin Jones wanted an updated on where things were with the investment case, preventative and early intervention. Sue Butcher responded that they were looking at community and faith based work and getting early assessments via this route. However, were not going for community teams as it was not a Slough Council service. Adele Taylor commented that there was a question around using the assets in the community in a much smarter way. Partner leadership in Slough could also be improved with Councillor involvement. Denise Murray commented on the scale of the challenge and the number of priorities. Mutual Ventures had not suggested more money was required. The plan would need to be built within the budget envelope.

Needed to think about the work being with the various partners. Early intervention prevention would be key going forward and how that was enacted would need to be demonstrated. Health could do more in Sue Butcher's view. Integrated Care Board (ICB) involvement would be discussed offline between Sue Butcher and Denise Murray. Gerard Curran wanted to know about the Company's position and how close it was to the Council. Sue Butcher reported the Company was not going to disappear but needed to streamline how it worked with the Council. The Getting to Good Board was the main vehicle for driving the change.

Action: Sue Butcher to share the Corporate Parenting slides she had received with the Commissioners.

7. IT Update (Simon Sharkey Woods)

7.1 Gavin reiterated that a full report would need to be produced to go to Cabinet which supported the decision to remain in Observatory House using evidence to support all decisions.

7.2 Assessment of Scale & Depth of Issues

7.2.1 Report not covered.

7.3 Timeline for Improvements and Mitigations

7.3.1 Not covered.

Action: Pat Hayes to produce an evidence based report for SBC to remain at Observatory House for end June 2023. This would be for presentation at July cabinet.

Action: Simon Sharkey Woods to report IT Update at June IRB.

8. AOB

None.

APPROVED