

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 29 June 2023**

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 29 June, 11am-12.45pm
Council Chambers, Observatory House**

Attendees:

Commissioners:

Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner (Chair)
Gerard Curran, Commissioner

Members:

Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader of the Opposition with responsibility for Improvement and Recovery
Cllr Wal Chahal Deputy Leader and Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets

Officers:

Stephen Brown, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Services
Adele Taylor – Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and S151 Officer
Sue Butcher – Executive Director, Children’s Services
Dean Tyler – Associate Director of Strategy & Insight
Patrick Hayes – Executive Director Housing, property & Planning
Simon Sharkey Woods - AD Chief Digital & Information Officer
Alexander Polak – Head of Governance & Scrutiny

Secretariat:

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

Apologies:

Denise Murray – Finance Commissioner, Cllr Pavitar Mann, Leader of the Opposition, Stephen Taylor – Monitoring Officer, Tony Wisken – Associate Director of Transformation, Sarah Hayward – Operating Officer

Not Attending:

Richard West – Executive Director, Place & Communities, Marc Gatsby – Executive Director, People – Adults, Cllr Paul Kelly – Lead for Children’s Services, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board

Thursday 29 June 2023

Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions (*Gavin Jones*)

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest made.

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

3.1 Approved.

3.2 On actions Dean Tyler appointed as SPoC. Action updates and progress reported as much improved.

4. Commissioner Update (*Gavin Jones*)

4.1 Next Phase of Intervention

4.1.1 No sense of the commissioners going light in terms of working with Slough. Going to take a long time for the council whereby the government is content with SBC being able to operate on its own.

4.1.2 Very much a shared objective to get the council to become fully independent and sustainable on its own and services are operating well.

4.1.3 Commissioners will provide greater clarity on what an exist strategy will look like. There will be a quantitative element to that strategy. The intervention style will be one of collaboration. Commissioners will expect the Council to be responsive to the Commissioner team. Gerard Curran endorsed Gavin Jones' words. Need to be mindful of the dynamic of the situation. With the new administration and new senior officers not being responsible for the situation created. This could lead to an unfair dynamic. The only way out is to achieve incremental achievements. Transparency and honesty is very important. Scale of problems, next steps, and outcomes also essential. The judges of the exit are the Commissioners not the Council.

4.1.4 Leader observed that Cllr Chahal and Leader met with Ged and Denise over recent weeks and relationships are beginning to form. More of this kind of engagement would be welcome. Stephen Brown assured the Commissioners that they will be given a true and honest picture of the situation. Will give true picture of the issues as well as any improvements achieved.

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

5.1.1. Current position 18/19 still awaiting final sign off from Grant Thornton. Meeting scheduled with the auditors. Not expecting any changes, only fiscal sign off. Auditors have the 19/20 accounts and believe they will come to audit those in July. Audit may take longer than usual. There is a national discussion on how much local authorities are behind in their accounts. Retrospective rules can be applied to the 19/20 accounts. A lot of local authorities are in this position. Recruitment has improved the situation within the finance team. Goal is to show the improvement that the Council has made, the final outcome will not be affected.

5.1.2. Outturn position had been completed. Not shared with the members or commissioners yet. CLT needed to see it first. Overall, not in a too different position in

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board

Thursday 29 June 2023

period 9. There was an underspend which Adele wanted to put to one side to cover the challenges for 23/24. This would be finalised over the coming week.

- 5.1.3.** Budget monitoring period work has been done. Month 2 to month 3 required a lot of work. Month 3 would go to September Cabinet meeting. Needed to move budgets to the right place rather than have them all held centrally so budget owners can manage them directly. Some of the centralised provisions needed to be reallocated. Making sure there was clarity and transparency of the different types of budgets.
- 5.1.4.** Recruitment of new staff – very successful for the permanent roles. Six candidates shortlisted, all of excellent calibre. Selling point is that it could be a career defining opportunity. Slough is an exciting place to work. Incredible support received from members of the Council. Claire Priest had done some excellent external promotion.
- 5.1.5.** Sue Butcher very successful at recruiting team leaders and social workers to SCF. It has become a more desirable place to work. Agency staff had existed earlier than anticipated, which was a positive.
- 5.1.6.** On behalf of Denise Murray, Ged Curran asked about the savings programme for this year. Looking for the tracker to be RAG rated, and more clarity on what would be delivered and what would not. Adele responded that due to no finance board in June this had not been reported, however the information was available to share.

Action: Adele to share the latest information with Commissioners on savings programme for this year and tracker which should include what would and would not be delivered.

- 5.1.7.** Development of Medium-term financial plan for the next 3 years to be produced. Will come to the next Finance Board in July.

Action: Nasreen to add to July FB agenda.

- 5.1.8. DWP issues update:** Particular system issues have been resolved, and the 57 days lag time on processing new claimants should come down considerably. Adele meeting with DWP on 17 July.

Action: Adele to keep commissioners updated on this issue.

- 5.1.9.** Greater clarity on mission critical issues on internal audit and get agreement on the issues themselves. Adele to discuss in more detail with Denise when she returns.

Action: for Nasreen to arrange meeting with Denise/Adele to discuss clarity on mission critical issues on internal audit in more detail.

- 5.1.10. Asset Disposal:** Slide 16 of the slide deck would benefit from a clear table outlining, annual targets, receipts received and market pipeline to enable the current gap to be clearly stated. Pat confirmed this will be tweaked to show the granularity required.

Action: Pat Hayes to amend slide 16 as requested and circulate to Commissioners.

- 5.1.11.** Training for new Members had gone well.

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board

Thursday 29 June 2023

6. Progress Update on Improvement (Stephen Brown)

6.1 Leader highlighted that he addressed the staff at the Roadshow and attend Scrutiny Committee which was focused on the improvement plan and setting terms of reference on that. Spoke at length on the culture change agenda. Was seeing positive signs, particularly in the area of recruitment where Slough was now becoming a more desirable place to join. Use of agency staff was decreasing which was another positive.

The messages were well received from the staff and members. Leader was keen to attend more Roadshows going forward to facilitate staff engagement and visibility and wanted to encourage positive messages to be shared with staff at these events.

Away Day for CLT and Cabinet Members had now been scheduled. Will be a good opportunity to develop personal relationships as well as professional. Abby Brown of Stoke spoke with the Members of the challenges faced by SBC, which was very well received. Commissioners welcomed feedback from the Away Day. Leader invited the Commissioners to the follow up Away Day. Cllr Chahal reflected that Member engagement has been excellent. Feedback from Cllrs on the Roadshow was positive as well as staff feedback, they liked the transparency and openness, and the idea of being invited on the journey.

6.2 *Review of Recovery Plan and progress against directions (Stephen Brown)*

- 6.2.1 The reporting pack had been slimmed down to a more digestible format. Preparation for the IRB Boards had been taken out of the CLT and put into the Transformation Board. Exit strategy for each of the Directions was key and would be discussed in July where evidence would be used to demonstrate progress against each of the Directions.
- 6.2.2 There was a refresh of the Corporate Plan. New Leadership had ownership of the new corporate plan and have put their stamp on the direction of travel. It would be out to consultation for six weeks to September. Would utilise the latest census information and LGA review of satisfaction. Results had not been positive with less than half the trust and satisfaction from residents compared to the national picture. Building a narrative of the challenges for young people. Leader to become Chair of the health and wellbeing board. Improve health outcomes for young people. Also getting young people into good jobs and assisting those with special needs would need to be a priority. This fed into the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Once the feedback had been received in September from the consultation, a set of priorities would be provided for Adele to build into the MTFP for February 2024. Sue Butcher reported on a recent Celebration Fun Day which Cllr Kelly and Cllr Smith attended. The event had gone very well.
- 6.2.3 Stephen Brown reported that everything would be about the actions that the council would take to achieve its objectives under each action plan, which was vital to have. It was about taking a multigenerational approach. Childhood obesity and substance abuse were two key issues within the Borough which the Council wanted to tackle.
- 6.2.4 Culture change agenda was moving at pace and the Leader and CLT were aligned on it. At the Roadshow the update on culture change was outlined. No objections received from the staff. Hybrid working message was outlined to staff. Would be reaching some principles and then conduct a staff consultation over the next few weeks. Scrutiny meeting on Tuesday 27 June went very well.

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board

Thursday 29 June 2023

6.2.5 Staff survey results had been received. Word cloud contained many negative words from staff. Results would be analysed over the coming week.

6.2.6 Agreed that the reporting pack to include a front-page dashboard for Board meetings.

Action: Dave Hounsell to insert dashboard to front page of reporting pack for Board Meetings going forward.

6.2.7 Slough has many multigenerational households, plus larger numbers per households. Pat Hayes been rolling out a programme to deal with damp issues in housing stock. Better quality of housing leads to better health outcomes. On culture, Leader reflected that it was of good strength that the same message was being given to staff, councillors, and residents.

6.2.8 Ged Curran asked for a steer on the response times for calls. Performance was worse than 12 months ago and was a priority to be fixed. What conclusions can Commissioners draw from it? SB responded that it was not good enough. CLT have discussed it recently as to how it can be moved on. Agency staff were used for 12 months while the digital transformation took place, however, that digital transformation has not taken place. Ged Curran asked about anything else that emerged from the conversation with CLT other than the digital transformation.

Action: Conversation with Ged/Stephen Brown & Sarah Hayward to be done offline, Nasreen to arrange.

6.2.9 Adele confirmed that twelve additional agency staff would be retained but had asked for an update on how this would be progressed. Pat Hayes, needed to recognise that the housing service was contributing to the pressures on the call centre. On the housing management side, response times were reducing although recognised more work still needs to be done. Also needed to have a proper reception area. How services manage their demand was key.

7. Democratic Governance Improvement Deep Dive (Alexander Polak)

7.1 Work was broken down into different phases. The first was preparing how to do the work and reporting to the IRB. Phase two, things that could see already that needed to be done. Phase three, things don't know for sure whether will need to be done, so had been put on hold until after the elections. (Slides 40-47 of slide deck).

7.2 Bethan Evans completed a workshop with CLT early this year which provided a baseline for Officers. Next member survey will be done in October, which will provide a good temperature check.

7.3 Stephen Taylor keen to know if Commissioners felt this area was on track based on the reporting so far.

7.4 Further discussion on reporting in a more Slough specific way would be done offline with Ged Curran.

Action: Nasreen to arrange meeting for Ged/Alex Polak/Stephen Taylor for a more Slough-specific reporting discussion on governance.

7.5 In the Jim Taylor report culture was the key issue and this would need to be addressed for democratic governance and scrutiny. Any informal governance would be monitored very closely

Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board Thursday 29 June 2023

by Commissioners to ensure transparency and consistent governance across the Council is maintained.

8. IT Update (Simon Sharkey Woods)

- 8.1 Principle concern was the ability of the Council to absorb the changes that needed to be made. Staff did not know how to react to project management and didn't want to absorb new ways of working. ICT Strategy was adopted by the Council in March 23, prior to that there had not been one. The entire customer journey had not been worked out. Staffing resource within the IT team was very low and was flagged on the corporate risk register.

Stephen Brown commented that training of staff had not happened up until now and there needed to be a proper programme of training.

8.2 *Assessment of Scale & Depth of Issues*

- 8.2.1 Simon Sharkey Woods reported that Slough had one person, compared to Birmingham for example, who had twelve.

Scale: budget was £1m for this year, with £1.2m to come. This was not enough funding to resolve the ITC issues that the Council faced. Birmingham reportedly had £8m and that was a fairer figure for the scale of the work required.

Needed a properly funded IT strategy. Employee journey needed to be included in the discussion with the customer journey. Needed a plan that recognised that employee journey. Change Champions to be used more within the Council. The trajectory for improvement to be taken offline.

Action: Simon SW to meet with Commissioners for a much deeper discussion on the strategy to achieve service delivery – Nasreen to arrange.

9. Senior Management Restructure

- 9.1 Full council on 27 July will agree the restructure of proposal to reduce 6 EDs to 5.
- 9.2 Moving away from current AD model. The second stage of the restructure would be to move away from GM model to Heads of Service. Aim was to make it cost neutral at the end of the process and budget had been allocated for it.
- 9.3 The broad restructure, aims and objectives were supported by the Commissioners. It featured as one of the Directions for tiers 1-3 that Commissioners were involved in this process as they had direct accountability on this to the Secretary of State. Commissioners reinforced the message that they needed to be actively involved in the process, they were not in a consultancy capacity. Would prefer to avoid having to halt the process if that involvement were not to happen.
- 9.4 How people were treated through the restructures would be vital for success. Commissioners were keen to see how that was managed for both successful and unsuccessful staff. It was an important stamp of the cultural change that the Council was aspiring to.

Action: Stephen Brown to keep Commissioners regularly informed.

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 29 June 2023**

10. AOB

10.1 Forward Plan (Stephen Brown)

10.1.1. Deep Dives: Commissioner team will decide how best deep dives will be done at the IRBs going forward. Will aim to give as much notice as possible to the teams to prepare. Need to allow more time so proper reporting and discussion can be achieved.

Action: Commissioners to provide feedback on the IRB pack and agenda format for future meetings.

Meeting closed at 12:00pm

APPROVED