

**Minutes of the Improvement and Recovery Board
Thursday 27 July 2023**

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Thursday 27 July, 11am-12.30pm
Council Chambers, Observatory House**

Attendees:

Commissioners:

Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner (Chair)
Gerard Curran, Commissioner
Denise Murray – Finance 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
Dean Tyler – Associate Director of Strategy & Insight
Patrick Hayes – Executive Director Housing, property & Planning
Stephen Taylor – Monitoring Officer
Sarah Hayward – Operating Officer

Secretariat:

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

Apologies: Cllr Pavitar Mann, Leader of the Opposition, Tony Wisken – Associate Director of Transformation, Sue Butcher – Executive Director, Children’s Services

Not Attending:

Cllr Wal Chahal Deputy Leader, and Lead for Financial Oversight & Council Assets

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Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions (*Gavin Jones*)

Noted that the Leader of the Opposition was not present and had not been in attendance at the Board Meetings. Commissioners would take this up with Cllr Mann offline.

2. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest expressed.

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

3.1 Commissioners thanked Dean Tyler as SPoC as actions and relations had seen an improvement. Previous minutes approved. Actions updated.

4. Commissioner Update (*Gavin Jones*)

4.1 *Next Phase of Intervention*

4.1.1 Commissioners Away Day planned for 2 August where it was hoped a reset would be achieved. Reporting on council and cabinet reports to be channelled through Nasreen Brittain going forwards by both Commissioners and Slough. Stephen Taylor and Nasreen Brittain had worked on the scheduled and an additional column had been added to show which Commissioner would be reporting on a particular report for Cabinet/Council. This was designed to help achieve early engagement with Commissioners on those reports that may have been red rag rated or more of a priority/complexity. Commissioners welcomed this addition.

Commissioners would be defining which Commissioner would 'Lead' on which Direction. Once that had been finalised at the Away Day, it would be communicated with the Council.

Commissioners would be spending an extended session with CLT on 23 August.

5. Update from the Finance Board on 20 July 2023 (*Denise Murray*)

5.1.1. Update papers were included in the IRB pack.

5.1.2. DSG and Safety Valve – the backlog identified within the caseloads was a key emerging risk. The details had not been fully quantified and were not in the SV document or accounts.

5.1.3. 18/19 accounts should be completed by Grant Thornton by end July. A good overview was given at the Finance Board. Further deep dive to follow to include more of detail. A very close eye would be kept on this by Commissioners.

5.1.4. 22/23/24 – there were some improvements, however a lot more work was still required. Commissioners were unable to provide assurance to DLUHC until the detail had been provided. DLUHC had expressed concern at the lack of detail being provided by SBC. Therefore, the right pace needed to be achieved on this, together with the appropriate resource support.

5.1.5. Recruitment – reported a positive outcome.

5.1.6. There wasn't a paper for risk management and how risk was managed within the organisation. Adele reported that there was a meeting scheduled with the auditors Grant Thornton on 9 August. Were hoping to get a better idea of what the council could and could not do at that meeting. Adele was meeting with Cllrs O'Kelly and Cllr Chahal to keep them up to speed on developments as well. 22/23/24 accounts would

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be going to September cabinet. Capitalisation direction model was being rebuilt to ensure that it was easily understandable by all. Adele reported she has had to check and recheck the content line by line as there have been anomalies within it that need to be ironed out. There were a lot of centrally held budgets, which needed to be looked at to move to the right place.

5.1.7. On Capitalisation Direction Denise reiterated that any potential variations in position would need to be made very clear together with any underspend assumptions all would require DLUHC approval. Adele commented that capacity within the finance team had improved, with use of interims, and new recruitment. Could see acceleration in pace with the new people being brought in. Ideally wanted permanent staff but, in the meantime, the interim staff had made a huge difference to the level of pace. Adele felt more confident that the right interims were in place. Denise responded that staffing capacity to complete the accounts would be required for a full year. So, additionality would need to be considered and planned for. Adele was looking at moving resource around to allow for this. The meeting on the 9 August with the auditors Grant Thornton would be crucial in determining how much work there would be, and what resources that would require. Ged asked if Adele was confident that all departments would be able to properly control their budgets. Adele felt there would need to be sufficient evidence from each department that they would be able to manage their budgets effectively. Everything was to be analysed very closely before budgets were handed out to departments.

5.1.8. The two deputy S151 roles had now been recruited. Expected start dates were between September and October. A third person had also been recruited which was a huge positive. Expected to be able to do permanent recruitment for the next levels down going forward.

5.1.9. DWP update had been given at the Finance Board. Continuing with the agreed actions. Support from DWP had been accepted and was expected to start in September. Adele would provide more detailed updates at future Finance Boards.

5.1.10. The Leader updated on Cabinet and reported that all cabinet members were focussed on the priority areas. Briefings were being provided to cabinet members from support officers. One to one contact with service heads were also in place. Were trying to plan ahead. An internal lead member away day was being planned for August. Had not done a lot of forward planning yet but were taking things a month at a time. Focus was initially on rolling out the fortnightly bin collection. Next, the focus would move to the budget. The new administration had entered an extraordinarily difficult time where having ambitious goals would be difficult to achieve within the financial constraints of the Council. The Leader responded that they were conscious there was a restructure in progress, which would in turn lead to some tweaking of cabinet members' responsibilities.

6. Progress Update on Improvement (Sarah Hayward/Stephen Brown)

6.1. Slides 4-7 of the deck contained the latest rag rating of each direction. Green indicated 'on track to deliver'. Slide 8 contained key headlines showing changes since the last IRB in June. Wanted to improve the pack and make it smaller. Aimed to slim each Direction down to one slide. Deep dives on scrutiny had been done, and deep dive on IT was taking place with Commissioners on 27 July. Commissioners confirmed they wanted to provide clarity on the

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themes they wanted the Council to focus on which would assist the pack content going forward.

Gavin confirmed that the focus was to be on the Directions. The end goal was a Council that was managing itself well and allocating its resources properly. Denise commented that financial sustainability encompassed the whole Council. Adult social care and temporary accommodation were areas that were showing emerging pressures and concern. Commissioners would want to see the Council had a clear plan to address these emerging challenges. Ged thanked Sarah Hayward for providing the background documents to culture change.

Stephen Taylor reported there were real issues in social care. A task and finish group had been set up for adult social care. There was a great deal of apprehension on the quality of the Services. Members were conscious of scrutiny and the wider picture. Feedback was that two of the task and finish groups were to focus on the Directions, and the third would focus on the wider services the Council provides.

How do we pick up dynamic changes? Sarah Hayward responded there was a corporate piece of work being done in preparation for the upcoming CQC peer review. The risk register was one mechanism to help with monitoring this.

Denise reported that adult social care was under the transformation programme and were in the final three years. Commissioners requested a deep dive into adult social care. Mark Gadsby to provide background papers to commissioners on adult social care.

Action: Nasreen to obtain background documents on adult social care from Marc Gadsby via Dean and set up deep dive meeting with Commissioners and Marc Gadsby.

Gavin asked whether people felt they were on top of the workload and what the sense was of where the Council was in terms of its recovery work. Stephen Brown felt in most areas an incremental improvement was taking place. No areas could be ignored, however. The Council was managing the challenge of trying to control everything at once rather than focus on certain areas and allocate resources accordingly.

Stephen Brown reported that the Leadership team kept motivation and focus up amongst the staff by engaging in a collaborative approach, a sense of camaraderie and that everyone was in this together. He felt the staff could see a brighter future. There were specific morale issues, but generally staff were on board with the Council's ambitions. Sarah Hayward reported she did 'shout outs' in team meetings to highlight good work being done by team members. Good performance was being celebrated. It was felt that following the 25-year anniversary since Slough became a unitary authority; this was something that could be formally celebrated as milestone. Lead Commissioner agreed, and felt it was important to also celebrate the positives. Adele felt people were buying into the vision more than before. Ged felt this would be good to be seen through in the culture change piece.

Stephen Taylor responded that with twenty-two new members, there was a twin track and expressed concern about some of the language from some Members. Emails from some Members have been overtly critical of others on their competence. This was clearly of concern.

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Also needed to work out how to get the Opposition Labour group to be more positive in its engagement in general. It was going to be important to work with **both** parties. He had encouraged cross-party discussion and engagement to make things work. Some frank conversations had taken place as a result. More work still needed to be done. Needed to get Scrutiny Chair and Members to think about what outcomes they would like and how to manage that process. Equally important to celebrate any successes on the Members' side. Relationship with Members and Officers would be of keen interest to the Commissioners. Leadership from the administration would be key on this matter. Agreed to have further discussion would be done offline. It would be essential to stamp out unsubstantiated comments to ensure authenticity is maintained. Ged commented that that said, the Council must be able to celebrate the real achievements while remaining open to identifying the areas that were not working.

Stephen Brown reported they had embarked on a purpose-led culture change programme. Healthy living and children's health was to be a key component for the corporate plan.

6.2 Restructure Update:

Late paper submissions handed out on the restructure. Stephen Brown commented that the pace of change has accelerated significantly with the new CLT. The number of EDs will reduce further in the next couple of years and will be reviewed nearer the time. Need expertise at the Director level to free up the EDs to focus on the strategy. The Our Futures Restructure had hollowed out the organisation the effects of which were still being felt. The restructure would have a transitional cost associated with it.

Recruitment was an issue. Discussions were taking place on who to use to carry out the recruitment. Commissioners would be updated on this when further discussion has taken place. The London Model has been adopted to make it attractive for people to come to Slough. Work-life balance offer will be considered to attract the talent needed. Pat Hayes responded that for the Housing Director role, there had been a requirement for availability to come into the office 5 days a week, with flexibility built in. A consultation to be carried with staff on hybrid working model next month. Will need to ensure the politicians align with the Council's view on this. Leader responded they are trying to get to a model where staff are in the office 3 days a week.

Denise wanted to know how hybrid working aligned with the asset disposal programme. Pat responded that the majority of the staff would be in the office 3 days a week. Having a good reception area would be key to this. In numerous areas there would be a 5 day a week, 9-5 staff presence.

Stephen Brown reported that staff commented on the survey to say they valued being in the office. Residents expected to see staff in the building and so were also considering making Observatory House open for the public to come in and access the services available. Needed to ensure what presence there would be Monday through to Friday as currently staff were not in the office on Mondays or Fridays.

Ged commented that staff debated productivity when considering hybrid working. Productivity wasn't necessarily a linear thing and he wanted to know whether there was data available to use across the services to support productivity. Management practices needed to

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be improved at Slough. Principles would need to be set at corporate level rather than at managerial.

Denise commented that a key area was the culture change; how that would be worked through with home-working and how that would be delivered while people were not physically in the office. Adele responded that she had had conversations with HR about employer brand and using the finance recruitment as a case study model. Commissioners reiterated they wanted to be very much involved in this process.

The consultation process had also started. Timelines were outlined by Stephen Brown. 1 November was restructure completion date. Those remaining would be in post, and vacancies would then be recruited for. The timetable, however, was very tight. It was recognised this would be a difficult time for staff and would need to be managed with sensitivity at every stage.

- 6.3 Lead Commissioner and S151 Officer confirmed they would not be able to get involved in the recruitment outsourcing partnerships as they were both members of Solace and that would be a conflict of interest.

7. AOB

- 7.1 None.

Meeting closed at 12.20pm.

APPROVED