

Improvement and Recovery Board – Meeting held on Thursday 25 July 2024

Present:

Attendees:

Commissioners:

Chair, Ged Curran, Commissioner
Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner (remotely joined at latter end of meeting)
Denise Murray, Finance Commissioner

Members:

Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader, with responsibility for Improvement and Recovery

Officers:

Peter Hopkins – Director, Property and Assets
Marc Gadsby - Executive Director of People and Adults
Sukdave Ghuman - Monitoring Officer
Patrick Hayes - Executive Director Housing, Property and Planning
Tessa Lindfield - Director of Public Health
Annabel Scholes - Interim S151 Officer
Sonia Khan - Director of Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement
Stephen Menzies - Interim Director of Digital, Data and Technology

Secretariat:

Mandy Brown, Chief of Staff to Commissioners

Also Present:

Andrew Merritt-Morling, Programme Manager
Deemple Brain
MHCLG representative, Minutes
MHCLG representative

Not In Attendance:

Cllr Wal Chahal – Deputy Leader, and Lead for Financial Oversight and Council Assets
Cllr Pavitar Mann – Leader of the Opposition
Sue Butcher – Executive Director, Children’s Services, Chief Executive Slough Children’s Services
Dave Hounsell – Acting Head of Service
Nasreen Brittain, Executive Assistant to the Commissioners

Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions:

1.1 Introductions made.

2. Declarations of Interest:

2.1 No declarations of interest expressed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 11 April 2024:

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 April 2024 were approved.

4. Update from the Finance Board (Denise Murray):

a) Over the past quarter, there have been experienced significant changes. Denise acknowledged the substantial efforts made during this period, including the completion of balance sheet work, despite a few caveats related to the DSG.

b) The team has been diligently working on the accounts for 2021, 2022, and 2023, fully aware of the challenging timelines for delivery. Denise noted property evaluations will impact the net outcome for 2024.

c) Denise noted the need for greater clarity on some issues. The finance improvement plan has been refreshed, and Denise recognised the hard work and benefits that have resulted from these efforts.

d) There are several broader issues to consider, including resourcing challenges and the workforce strategy plan. Internal audit continues to face some difficulties. Additionally, there are concerns related to the overarching financial position, MTFS outlook, and issues anticipated in 2024/25.

e) The increase above the target needs to be flagged as an area of concern. A recovery strategy is necessary to address the budget gap, which is projected to be £15 million towards the end of the term and £32 million overall. This gap must be closed within the financial year. A recovery plan should be outlined and integrated into the operating model.

5. Update from Transformation Board (Ged Curran):

a) It was noted that it has taken some time to establish the board and get into the rhythm of working, aligning papers through the CLT, and obtaining commissioner sign-off but that the mechanics have been up and running. Sonia confirmed the paper going to Cabinet is refined version of paper shared in September's Transformation Board and that they want to test the principles. Review points will be layered over.

6. Refresh of Improvement and Recovery Plan (Will Tuckley):

a) Will updated on this. At the last meeting, the cabinet reviewed overall progress in recovery and improvement. SBC took the opportunity to initiate a high-level recovery and refresh process, focusing on three key elements: wellbeing, finances, and the operating model. This is a lengthy process and is currently under active development. Will said the team are working on an actionable plan that outlines a vision for the next few years.

b) Will explained that time is needed to assess position and communicate with everyone involved and set a phased approach. Phase 1 is to define evidence of a well-operating model and its implications for Slough, using the Best Value Guidance framework and LGA peer review features. An illustration is ready for the finance team. Phase 2 is to use each work program to guide progress and integrate into the transformation framework. There is a need to establish key measures for success

and adopt a new direction. This is an opportunity to explain current situation, and outline priorities for the corporate plan. The aim is to complete this between August and September, with a public release in autumn. Key tasks will also include developing strategic communications, financial plans, and a framework for resident engagement to understand their perspectives.

c) Will said SBC are currently reviewing its performance framework, which is evaluated at the end of each calendar year. This review presents an opportunity to link broader standards with the recovery plan. One of the key areas the council need to address is the lack of confidence and trust among residents and staff, which will be a measure of success. The council is adopting a heat map approach that includes community engagement components to capture its relationship with residents. This will be more pronounced in the operating model, with a range of engagement types being crucial to this effort. Working closely with residents will help build trust.

d) Ged urged for rigour in program and project management, acknowledging this is a significant program of work in a short period. Success will require the necessary rigor, with more structure and substance. He also noted the timetable is very tight and must be adhered to. There was an acknowledgement that the heat map is helpful. Ged noted a risk of superficial initiatives and advised on only moving items to green when milestones have been truly achieved.

e) There was a discussion on the heatmap. The August 2023 heatmap was based on the council's analysis at that time and did not reflect the commissioners' view. The Council felt the March 2024 heatmap is more realistic. The August 2023 heatmap was aspirational, showing reasonable progress, but it wasn't necessarily validated by actual delivery. It was agreed that there was a need to consider progress and ensure it is accurately reflected. Stephanie explained that given the state of flux, much had changed since the papers were submitted.

7. Target Operating Model (Andrew Merritt-Morling):

a) Andrew updated that work on the operating model has been mobilised and maintained. From June 17th to July 19th, the team engaged in approximately 80 hours of workshops and discussions in Adult and Children's Social Care. The team are developing a product and have identified 40 new key lines of inquiry. They are exploring options to develop best practices. The Target Operating Model (TOM) is an iterative process, and further development is underway.

b) Denise raised some concerns about the in-year recovery and the work that needs to be completed. She noted that clarity is needed on the differences between the two work streams and the potential consequences. Additionally, the council needs to consider the balance of its position and the data being gathered for the new operating model and the proposed changes.

c) Will said there needs to be strict budgetary control for the £10-15 million recovery program, with continuous scrutiny and recovery control. He noted the tight timescales. Some measures are one-off but may impact future prospects. Data is crucial for a comprehensive view and understanding changes for residents. The next stage is to be more analytical and adopt a top-down approach for clarity on service impact. Will noted a need to be precise about actions and demands on key services, especially those needing strong correction.

d) Ged highlighted three key questions. Have demand-side issues been considered? Have supply-side issues been considered? Have potential income sources been evaluated? The team said they are examining these aspects to strengthen the process. Most councils are focusing on digital solutions. There needs to be an assessment of rigor and available resources. Some elements have emerged, and discussions will continue.

8. Data and Insight (Stephen Menzies):

a) Stephen presented a business case and options appraisals covering three areas: i) resourcing a data management team; ii) investing in a single data management platform; and, iii) developing a career development framework for data professionals within the council. The likely investment cost was in the region of £500,000.

b) It was noted that the council is starting for a modest data maturity level and that incremental progress is being made across a number of key areas such as ASC and ensuring all staff have access to PowerBI licencing. There are also cultural issues with the council's approach to data and how it can be used to support predictive service planning.

c) Ged said there needs to be a CLT discussion on these issues, and it must be explicit. He said that commissioners acknowledge the significant amount of work that has been done here.

d) Gavin fully endorsed the need for strategic discussions as part of the TOM noting this demonstrates a cultural shift and strategic impact. There should be a shared view on the strategic impact at the council, involving commissioners.

9. Peer Mentoring (Dexter Smith):

a) The Leader noted that good progress has being made and that mentoring has been offered to all of the committee chairs and members of the opposition group and that mentoring has been beneficial. Cabinet is talking much more. Development courses have also been signed up to. There will be better support once a new cabinet support officer is in place.

b) Ged noted there may be other help within the council that could support members.

c) Gavin noted that this is an important element of the recovery and the need for mentoring to be valuable. He said he was keen all of the councillors that need mentoring are taking the opportunity for this as it is critical. Commissioners are taking an active interest in this.

(The meeting closed at 12:30pm)