

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 29th April, 2025.

Present:- Councillors Stedmond (Chair), Hulme (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Dauti, Matloob, O’Kelly, Rana and Satti

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors W. Sabah and Tomar

PART 1

114. Declarations of Interest

The were no declarations of Interest received.

115. Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th March 2025

Resolved: that the minutes of the meetings held on 25 March 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

116. Launching a Task and Finish Group to scrutinise the Improvement and Recovery Programme

The Director of Strategy Change and Resident Engagement presented the report to the Committee. The report recommended launching the Committees next Task and Finish group in June 2025 and that it be added to the forward plan for 2025-26. It was suggested that the Task and Finish Group focused on the Improvement and Recovery programme and would operate throughout the year. The Committee were provided with two appendices: Appendix A – the Governance of Improvement and Recovery Programme including scrutiny and Appendix B – Draft scope for the proposed Task and Finish Group.

The Committee were informed that the key changes to the Governance were that

- There was now a Corporate and Service Improvement Board, this was chaired by the Leader, Commissioner involvement was present and was more Council-led. The Board would oversee the improvement and recovery plan, other improvement plans and the corporate improvement framework.
- There would also be a Financial Improvement Board that would be chaired by the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Deputy Leader, and this Board would oversee the direction of financial improvement programme. The Commissions would also be involved in the Board.

- It had been agreed that the agenda and papers would be agreed by the Lead Commissioner, the lead Officers and the Chair, leading to a Council-led approach.
- Sitting above these was the quarterly Best Value Board, which would be chaired by the Commissioners and the Chair of scrutiny would be invited to this Board. The Best Value Board would take assessment of progress on a quarterly basis. The first meeting had taken place already.
- It was key to work with scrutiny, and it was up to the Scrutiny Committee how that went forward.
- There would be regular Member briefings.
- There would be Task and Finish Groups set up to do deep dives into areas.

An early draft of the governance proposals had already shared with the Committee and the suggestion of the Task and Finish Group so that the reporting could be set up.

There was an aspiration to align the Children's Improvement Board that would oversee the SEND Improvement and Children's Social Care Improvement, all under the overall governance suggested. This had not yet been agreed.

The following points were made:

- The Leader commented that the first Best Value Board had taken place. This was originally the Commissioners Transformation Board. The Commissioner was present at the meeting. As the Chair of the Corporate and Service Improvement Board, the Leader was very happy for the official Member of the Opposition or any other Member such as the Chair of Scrutiny or the Chair of a Task and Finish Group, to communicate with the Leader, in advance of the meeting, to discuss any of the items on the Agenda. This would assist to move through the process in a speedy manner with greater scrutiny and being more Member-led.
- Many Members of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed the Member-led process, this was a very positive move.
- A point was raised that how this would make a difference when it was the same Officers that were leading on this previously? The Leader commented that previously when attempting a transformation, it was very top-down and CLT-led. There were no Commissioners as Slough BC was not under intervention. This time it was going to be more resident focussed and a lot of work had been carried out to look at the resident experience. There was an additional benefit of the Commissioners vast experience and from the CEO who had led a Council out of intervention and another council through transformation and from many Officers such as the Section 151 Officer. There was a lot more experience now and the aim was to listen to residents more. The Director added that other points for the Committee to note included three points that were being focussed on:
 - Programme Management Approach – previously, everything was very high level based on RAG rating and no analysis. Now under every workstream, there was a detailed workstream plan

of what needed to be done and by when. These had been reported to Cabinet and Council. This focussed on the benefits and impacts making it a robust programme management approach.

- Measured Success – the Board should be able to measure and see if the targets set were being reached.
- Residents Insight – this was making sure that there was more of a resident perspective on improvements. A resident survey was being planned for June 2025 to compare against the last one carried out but also to set a baseline for this work. This would bring in peoples everyday lived insight. This would show that the council was being more open and less faceless. There was also a commitment to have a Resident Panel, later in the year which would be fed by rich insight and views and have a direct voice. There was a commitment to build a better picture of resident insight.
- It was highlighted that SEND and the children's services had been delayed and needed to be given more importance. The Director of Strategy Change and Resident Engagement reassured the Committee that the work was ongoing, the Boards had been set up for the other improvement work. This work was still Commissioner-led and were under separate intervention governance. The Leader highlighted that the intervention of SEND and Children's Services began in 2013 when it was a separate Children's commission. This was now being supported by Children's Services and Children's First Trust; all were working in integration to support the work due to complete by November 2026.
- The report explained that there were three Boards set up and may be a few more for the Children's Services Improvement work and with this would come a lot of overlap and Boards that met at different times and probably with the same Members and Officers. There was concern for the workload and the resources, with a large volume of work over a two-year period. The Committee were informed that it was totally the decision of the Committee how often they met to discuss the items of the Boards. The Terms of Reference would be circulated to the Committee for further clarity. **ACTION** The main points from the report was that there would be a quarterly Best Value Board that would meet four times a year and below that, a Corporate Service and Improvement Board and a Financial Improvement Board and both would meet eight times a year each and report into the Best Value Board. The scope of the Task and Finish Group was to focus on the improvement and recovery work overall taking place. The Team was ready to provide reports after Board Meetings if the Committee wanted to scrutinise any of the work. Members felt that the work needed to be simplified and streamlined and made a lot easier with respect to Member time and availability. The way it would work was if there was a larger Committee that would be better resourced. The Committee would be interested in areas that had been raised by residents and would want to see what progress was being made, subsequently, there could also be areas that were outside of the improvement work that

residents were concerned about, and the Committee may want to consider that. The Committee did require a sense of expectation considering that Children's Services and SEND work was still to be considered too. The Director suggested scoping the expectation of work around the Best Value Board and the PMO Lead work alongside the Scrutiny Officer to set a work programme going forward. The Leader commented that he understood the resources issues and reassured the Committee that if they wanted to carry out a deep dive, the appropriate level of support would be provided to do the work.

- The reports outlined that the Leader of the Opposition was invited to the Children's Services Boards but not to the Corporate Services and Improvement Board or the Financial Improvement Board, could it be explained why this was the case. The Director explained that the Leader of the Opposition would be invited to both Boards and the invitation had already been extended. The report showed a draft version, and the final version of the Terms of Reference would be circulated to the Committee Members.
- The role of the two Boards was not decision making but was more one that oversaw and steered the direction of work. The Commissions would be present at the meetings, engaging, inputting and on board but were allowing the Leader and Deputy Leader to Chair and shape the Agendas.
- Members reiterated that the Member-led improvement would deliver a lot more and have better outcomes. It was a welcomed step in the correct direction.
- There was a suggestion for residents to be coopted on to the Boards, providing a more on-the-ground viewpoint from residents such as nurses, teachers, diverse working people.

Resolved: that the Committee discussed the report thoroughly and approved the recommendations that:

a. the Committee Approved the scope of the task and finish group and the mechanisms by which it will engage with, prioritise, scrutinise and make recommendations, as set out in Appendices A and B; and

b. that the Committee would formally convene the task and finish group at its June meeting following a request to Group leaders to nominate a member of the committee to be join the task and finish group.

117. Budget Task and Finish Group

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer, providing an account of the work of the Budget Task and Finish Group between July 2024 and March 2025. The report summarised the reflection of the process and agreed that further work needed to be carried out by the Scrutiny Officer in conjunction with Finance to further improve the approach and address concerns raised. Five recommendations had been made to the Committee for the Scrutiny Officer to action.

A concern was raised about the timeliness of reports and Members have sufficient time to read and understand the information. The Section 151 Officer thanked Members for their comments and agreed that further work was required to better the process more. The Section 151 Officer could understand the concerns about the issuing of reports and would work towards a timelier publication of reports. The Committee were informed that Appendix C had been amended slightly and now provided a proper corporate planning cycle linking the financial to the strategy. The finance lead would work closely with the Scrutiny Officer to have a better programme of work. Members needed to understand the confidentiality of the reports and with that confidence, the Section 151 Officer could be more transparent.

Members discussed that meeting notes of informal meetings that made recommendations needed to be made, tracked and assurance given that the recommendations were being actioned.

A recommendation was made that the Dedicated Schools Grant for schools should be considered as part of the budget discussions, going forward, explaining how it was split up and showing the links to the incoming funds and how they were used for young people. The Section 151 Officer commented that a report would be presented at the next Schools Forum showing the challenges. This report could be presented at the Committee and at Cabinet. The Section 151 Officer was happy to take on the recommendation. **ACTION**

Resolved: that the Committee agreed the recommendations in the report as set out below and to consider the Dedicated Schools Grant as part of the budget discussions going forwards, looking into how the fund was split up and showing the links to the incoming funds and how they were used for young people:

- a. Noted the findings in the report;**
- b. Resolved to re-launch the task and finish group at its meeting in June; and**
- c. Directed the Scrutiny Officer to initiate implementation of the 5 recommendations in the report, ideally before the June meeting of CISC so that they can take effect when the new task group convenes in July.**

118. Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25

The report was presented to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer. The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to comment on and endorse the Annual Scrutiny Report 2024-25 which would be submitted to Council.

The Chair commented that the Committee had embedded improvements, delivered on a major part of the action plan, making public meetings more

focussed and business-like, made valuable recommendations to Cabinet, added value to the organisation, improved the quality of task and finish groups making them better focussed but there was a lot more to do. Further improvements were still needed to improve engagement and training, and support was available Members.

Many of the Committee Members took the opportunity to thank the Chair and Vice Chair and commented that they had really worked well together. Members thanked the Scrutiny Officer for all of his hard work and the tremendous support for Members. Scrutiny had been done much better. The Chair thanked Members for their positive comments and thanked all for their hard work. The Officer engagement had been very good too, Officers came and explained information that Members needed to know. The Committee needed to continue to be more independent, take on more resident focussed roles and involve residents and other partners more, including young persons.

A short discussion took place on Member engagement and encouraging Members not on the Committee to be involved in task and finish groups. The Monitoring Officer suggested that this could be on the Agenda for the Group Leaders Forum to raise attendance and engagement and invite the Chair to speak to the item. The Chair felt this was a good idea.

Resolved: that the Committee endorsed the Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25 and recommended to Council that the Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25 be noted and the improvement made by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee be commended.

119. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee were informed that this was to be agreed.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)