

CABINET

THURSDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Andrew Johnson (Chairman), Stuart Carroll (Vice-Chairman), David Cannon, David Coppinger, Samantha Rayner, David Hilton, Gerry Clark, Donna Stimson and Ross McWilliams

Also in attendance: Councillor Christine Bateson, Councillor Lynne Jones, Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Amy Tisi and Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra

Officers: Duncan Sharkey, Kevin McDaniel, Hilary Hall, Andrew Durrant, Chris Joyce, Adele Taylor, Tracey Hendren and David Cook.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2022 were approved.

APPOINTMENTS

None

FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet considered the contents of the Forward Plan for the next four months and noted the changes made since last published including the addition of the following two reports to March 2022 Cabinet:

- Queens Platinum Jubilee
- Climate Change Partnership

CABINET MEMBERS' REPORTS

A) TRANSPORT SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Cabinet considered the report regarding the proposed introduction of a new transport delivery model.

The Lead Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity informed Cabinet that in 2017, the Council made the decision to enter into a five-year highways and professional services contract with Project Centre Ltd to provide a range of services on behalf of the Council. This involved transferring some Council employees across to Project Centre under TUPE regulations.

Since then the needs of the service and priorities of the Council had changed and the end of the contract provided the opportunity to review the model for delivery of the service. We should be open minded when reviewing renewing contracts and that there was no preference for 'in house' or 'out house' but we needed the 'right house'.

Cabinet were informed that as part of the contract, nine roles undertaken by Council employees were transferred to Project Centre. The detail of these roles was provided within the report but he said they were split into five areas; account management, road safety and traffic management, transportation, development control and flood risk management and public transport support.

There had been several changes to the Council structure and its priorities since the original contract had been agreed almost 5 years ago. In terms of structure, the Council made the decision to separate the strategic transport and infrastructure functions from the commissioning service and create a new Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth service within the Place Directorate.

With the changes to the Councils structure there was a lack of clear accountability between the roles within RBWM and Project Centre and additional layers of management with officer work often being reviewed within the Project Centre hierarchy prior to being passed to RBWM officers for review again.

It was proposed to create a new team structure within Transport and Infrastructure with 13 roles. This included four existing roles, five roles with potential for TUPE from Project Centre and four additional roles to build capacity and improve service delivery. There would also be a contract with Project Centre to provide technical expertise and consultation roles. As Project Centre had the capacity and expertise to undertake these roles that were not day to day roles within the Council it was felt that this approach provided value for money and the best service delivery.

The Lead Member informed that the preferred option was to bring the contracted services back into the Council and let a new direct award contract to Project Centre to provide specific technical support.

He informed that the proposed arrangements would give greater clarity to other officers and members as well as better accountability for service delivery. Being fully integrated into the service would also provide stronger links to other parts of the Council and its priorities.

The other options considered were to extend the current contract or go out to tender. It was felt that these would not provide a solution to the problems faced, as detailed within the report.

The Chairman seconded the report and said the administration had been clear that their ideological approach had always been looking at outcomes, looking at value for money, looking at enhanced service delivery and looking at services on a case by case basis.

The Lead Member for Finance and Ascot said that five years has been a long time for the contract and he assumed at the time we signed it was the right thing to do. He mentioned that the Project Centre had excellent expertise and their output had been good especially with Ascot and the work with the LEP. He said the proposed mixture of in house and retaining a consultancy role was the correct way forward.

The Lead Member for Planning, Environmental Services and Maidenhead there were about 700 planning application each year and with each requiring knowledge of the local area giving advice on things such as traffic flow, he supported the proposals.

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Corporate & Resident Services, Culture & Heritage and Windsor said that she supported the report and the continued links with the Project Centre who had done excellent work in Windsor.

Cllr L Jones said that she supported the recommendations within the report for all the reasons already given. She had called in the paper in 2017 due to concerns she had about the outsourcing such as communication.

Cllr Baldwin said he also supported the report and had also expressed his concerns at the O&S meeting. Although he supported the recommendations he said he did not understand paragraph 2.8 and asked for clarification on this as well as why the service was outsourced in the first place.

The Lead Member said that he was not the Lead Member at the time outsourcing had taken place but it would have been a democratic process and the best solution for the councils needs at the time.

The Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth said that prior to the recent restructure we were a commissioning model but when knowledge and leadership was brought back into the new structure we had a different model that was client leadership rather than client management. It became a conflict of who was making decision the Project Centre or client team, this had created conflict and duplication.

Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and:

i) Approves the proposed change in delivery model to bring transport and infrastructure services back into the Council, including letting a new direct award contract to Project Centre Ltd to provide specific technical support.

B) DOMESTIC ABUSE SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

Cabinet considered the report regarding the adoption of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

The Lead member for informed Cabinet that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 required local authorities to prepare, consult on and publish a Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy to set out their strategic plans to comply with the Act.

The Lead Member said that Cabinet were asked to agree the strategy, associated action plan and six priorities for investment and delivery, with an overarching priority to ensure victims and their families have access to safe, good quality accommodation that meets their needs.

These priorities were: access to safe accommodation, support to remain safely at home, perpetrator management, coordinated support, victim representation, and improved data collection across services.

To ensure the strategy meets local needs, the council undertook a public consultation on its draft strategy, produced with support and input from relevant partner organisations including the Dash Charity, the Domestic Abuse Forum, Thames Valley Police, and health and social care services.

The Lead Member said that there had also been input from the Cabinet member responsible for Adult Social Care and Children's services and they had both worked on the report.

The Lead Member said that anyone could be affected by domestic abuse in its various forms, and access to good quality, safe accommodation, along with appropriate support, was critical to help victims escape their abuser and start to rebuild their lives. It was sad to report that

reports of abuse had increased during lockdown. The council had a zero tolerance approach as well as providing support.

The Lead Member said they already worked closely with partners to provide safe accommodation and tailored support packages for victims and their children, and he wanted all victims across the borough to know that they were not alone and help was available through a compassionate, thorough and clear process.

The new strategy complements the excellent joint working, initiatives and other important strategies they already had in place, by prioritising in line with local needs our investment and delivery to support those fleeing domestic abuse, along with an action plan backed with £241,000 from Government in 2022/23.

He thanked those who had worked on this strategy including DASH who were attending on line to address Cabinet.

The Chairman welcomed Alison Bourne and Rebecca Spiller from DASH to address Cabinet.

Alison informed that DASH had been, for the past 46 years, offering specialist support to victims of domestic abuse. It was important to note that this was not just providing accommodation but tailored support. They provided safe accommodation or safety within their own homes. They did not turn anyone away and were a not for profit organisation. They met all their KPI's even during the pandemic.

Rebecca said that DASH hoped that the strategy would be approved and they were in support of it. They offered a wrap around support service and were looking forward to bringing the strategy to life.

The Deputy Chairman of Cabinet, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health said that he had worked closely with DASH over the last 5 to 6 years and remembers the education into the subject they provided when he became Lead Member.

This was an important document to ensure our investment and delivery was focussed on what people think was most needed locally to support victims and their children. There had been a national increase in domestic abuse during the pandemic and it was clear the need to take a deeper, holistic approach to supporting victims was paramount, which includes access to safe accommodation as a crucial first step.

The Council stood right behind any victim of domestic abuse and would always do what we could with our partners to ensure victims in the borough could escape and get full support. The Council would continue to prioritise victims and also further advance our awareness and education campaign including the critical imperative of prevention and ensuring everyone can spot the signs. The strategy was victims first and it was important to support DASH and the delivery of the strategy.

The Lead Member for Finance and Ascot said that about 6 years ago scrutiny had looked at this issue and the fragmented approach, it was clear that care pathway was required. A lot had changed since then, and this strategy was an important element of any care pathway. It was important that victims lives were changed for the better and supporting the work that DASH provided.

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Corporate & Resident Services, Culture & Heritage and Windsor said that she supported the paper and that the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 had been championed by the MP Terisa May and the Duchess of Cornwall. She provided a number of statistic to demonstrate why this was an important issue such as 2 women were killed every week in England and Wales by their partners or ex partners, that there had been an increase in abuse during the pandemic and around 62% of children were living in a home where abuse

was witnessed. The abuse could effect all backgrounds, ethnicity and age. Access to safe accommodation and support was very important.

The Lead Member for Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside informed that she was aware how important this was to get right, she had to live with abuse for 17 years whilst brining up her family. It was a very lonely place to be and that was why organisations such as DASH were so important.

The Lead Member for Public Protection and Parking informed of his background in the police and thus his professional experience had informed how important it was to support this strategy.

Cllr Tisi said that she supported the report and the support for DASH. It was important that every penny from the government grant was used to get the best value for money. She mentioned that there was to be a local partnership board relacing the DAEG and asked what the membership would be and if it would contained representatives from health and children's services.

The Head of Housing, Environmental Health & Trading Standards replied that there were health representations, probation services, RBW and children's services as well as TVP and DASH.

Cllr Tisi said that table 2 showed the roles of a new housing officer and independent person, she asked if the independent person would be from DASH and why was the position not to be filled until December 2022. She was informed that there were two roles one in housing to fulfil the legislative requirements and the other would work with DASH and was being appointed in December to allow the recruitment process.

Cllr Tisi said that with regards to paragraph 7.4 did they think that when asked if they believe that providing accommodation to perpetrators protects victims, people understood that this meant providing accommodation for the perpetrator. Where possible it would be that the perpetrators would be provided with accommodation so the family could stay safe in their own home. She was informed that where possible they tried to keep the family in their own homes safe whilst complying with legislation and with the support of DASH. Providing accommodation for the perpetrator was usually done when both parents had equal right to the family home and if moving the perpetrator out would keep the family safe.

Cllr Tisa also mentioned that the contract wit DASH was due to expire 2022 with the option to extend by a year, she asked if the grant would be used to help support DASH. She was informed that last years funding would be used to support DASH and any left over and this years funding would be looked at.

The Deputy Chairman of Cabinet, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health said that he had been lobbying the Police and Crime Commissioner on this issue as he was aware that it was a policy priority for him. He would also continue to loby local MP's to look at more legislation regarding domestic abuse. The victims should always be the priority.

Resolved unanimously: that Cabinet notes the report and:

i) Approves the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021- 2024 for publication.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....