

RESOURCES AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Emma Faramarzi (Chair), Nick Martin, Des Moffatt, Timothy Swinyard, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Chris Watts and Robert Wright.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Allsopp and Maureen Penny.

15. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

Councillor Tim Swinyard made personal and non-prejudicial declarations of interest with regard to the Committee's consideration of Agenda Item 4, in his capacity as a member on the Advisory Group for Lydiard Park Heritage Trust and Lydiard Heritage Action Group.

16. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

17. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his portfolio of responsibility:

- Economic Development
- Museums, including Steam
- Commercialisation of services
- Arts and Culture
- Community Heritage
- Regeneration
- Forward Swindon Limited Client Lead Member
- Strategic (Commercial Property Portfolio)
- Adult Learning
- Tertiary Education
- Skills
- Specific Responsibility for Lydiard Park Project
- Country Parks (securing sustainable uses)
- Strategic Parking assets

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Perkins, in his presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within his portfolio which he felt had been most successful, those where a different approach might have produced

better results and the lessons that might have been learned as a consequence, and the challenges he expected to be faced by the Council in relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond, particularly in relation to on-going budgetary constraints.

Councillor Perkins referred to future investment to generate income and introduced Mrs Jan Willis, Interim Corporate Director Resources, who advised that the Commercial Investment Strategy was being submitted to Cabinet on the 7th December 2016 for its consideration. She confirmed that the strategy reflected long term investment and, in line with the Government Framework, sought approval to create an Investment Strategy Board who would oversee capital investments. Mrs Willis advised that the strategy included a proposal to establish a commercial investment fund.

Following his presentation of the report, Councillor Perkins, supported by the Corporate Director, Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions and observations on the following matters:

- How capital funding was generated and was to be managed by the Investment Strategy Board in order to allow strategic acquisition and generate income streams. It was noted that acquisitions would include strategic land and an enhanced commercial property portfolio.
- Confirmation that sites for a second recycle centre were being considered.
- The role of Forward Swindon Limited (FSL) to help regenerate parts of Swindon, including Kimmerfield and Farringdon Road areas. Members noted FSL's proposed consultation regarding Aspen House.
- The importance of ensuring that workshop spaces for small to medium businesses were made available as part of Swindon's regeneration programme.
- Confirmation that projects would be monitored to ensure completion within timescales and budgets.
- How the Business Engagement and Retention Services help small to medium businesses start-up and how they provide on-going support, including assisting businesses to access local, national and European grants.
- The importance of increasing footfall in the Centre of Swindon and how regeneration of the town centre would help this.
- Ensuring small businesses in the town centre were encouraged and supported and were not stifled by larger businesses.
- The criteria for business rates on small to medium sized businesses and its effect on them.
- The Plasma gasification research being undertaken in Swindon and the commercialisation of this project.
- The development of the former Even Swindon Infant School site in Rodbourne Road and the traffic congestion implications of such development.
- Comparison between Coate Water Park and Lydiard Park car park charges and the amount of subsidy being allocated to Coate Water Park. Members noted that Stanton Park was also classified as a country park.
- Resurfacing of the free car parking site in Gorse Hill and how the community was using this as a long stay car parking area and how this was adversely affecting local businesses.
- Progress made in bringing a University to Swindon.

- Confirmation that the property portfolio included heritage sites were geographically located within one area in Swindon. These attractions include the Carriage Works, Mechanics Trusts, the Railway Village, the Health Hydro and the Platform.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Perkins be thanked for attending the meeting to present this performance report and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(2) That Forward Swindon Limited be requested to circulate information regarding the number of business they helped to invest or move into Swindon over the past two years.

(3) That the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage, be requested to circulate to members available information regarding revenue generated by Coate Water Park parking charges and to update the Committee on discussions that had been undertaken with the University Technical College and Dyson regarding future collaborative work.