

Swindon Borough Council

Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 16 March 2020

Committee Room 6, Civic Offices

At 6.00 p.m.

Conservative Councillors

Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair)
Matthew Courtliff
Brian Mattock
Barbara Parry
Roger Smith
Timothy Swinyard
Vera Tomlinson

Labour Councillors

Robert Wright (Chair)
Steve Allsopp
Emma Bushell
Jim Grant
James Robbins
Carol Shelley

Committee Officer: Vicki Yull, 07980 752043, CommitteeServices@swindon.gov.uk

Swindon Borough Council can be contacted at the Civic Offices, Euclid Street, Swindon, SN1 2JH (Telephone 01793 445500)

Access Arrangements - The venue is wheelchair accessible and an infrared receiver hearing system is provided. If you have any special requirements to enable you to attend the meeting, or would like to receive any of the pages contained in this agenda in a larger print size, please contact the Committee Officer as soon as possible prior to the date of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that at the start of the meeting they should declare any known interests in any matter to be considered, and also during the meeting if it becomes apparent that they have an interest in the matters being discussed.

3. Minutes (Pages 5 - 14)

To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2020.

4. Public Question Time

See explanatory note below. Please contact the Committee Officer whose details appear at the top of this agenda if you need further guidance.

5. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Finance (Pages 15 - 22)

Date of Despatch: 06 March 2020

Public Question Time - Swindon Borough Council remains committed to increasing its accountability to the public and to promoting active citizenship. 15 minutes will be allowed at the start of all Council meetings for questions to the Chair from the public about the work of the Committee (except for confidential matters, and matters relating to planning and licensing applications). We will give priority to those who submit questions in writing at least two days before the meeting. Questions must be relevant, clear, and concise. You may not use Public Question Time as an opportunity to make speeches or statements.

Questions in writing should be sent to the Committee Officer whose contact details appear on the agenda above. We will publish it, along with the answer, alongside the Minutes. The process associated with asking a public question is set out in the "Public Question Time at Council Meetings Protocol and Guidance" available from the Committee Officer named above or on the Council's Website at:
<http://ww5.swindon.gov.uk/moderngov/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13338&path=0>.

The Scrutiny Committee - Terms of Reference

- To meet at regular intervals to review the policies, process and implications of Cabinet, Cabinet Member and Officer decision making and the way in which Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions are made;
- To consider requests for "Call-in" as defined in the Council's "Call-in" Procedure;
- To refer decisions back to Cabinet (or the decision maker) for reconsideration. It may do this once for any individual decision, after which if there is no agreement the decision will be referred to the full Council for determination;
- To refer Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for investigation without delaying the implementation of the decision concerned;
- To receive a report by the Leader of the Council at its first meeting after each Annual Council Meeting (or at such a meeting as is agreed by the Chair of the Committee and the Leader of the Council) on the service issues for the year ahead, the Leader of the Council's priorities for the coming year and on the Council's performance in the previous year;
- To oversee the arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny within the Council, including determining (i) where matters fall within the remit of more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which of those Committees will assume responsibility for any particular issue, (ii) a system to ensure that referrals from Committees to the Cabinet, either by way of report or for reconsideration are managed efficiently and do not exceed any limits set out in the Council's Constitution, and (iii) in the event of reports to the Cabinet exceeding any limits in this Constitution or if the volume of such reports creates difficulty for the management of Cabinet business or jeopardises the efficient running of Council business, at the request of the Cabinet to make decisions about the priority of referrals made.
- To carry out any investigation into the business and functions of the Council and to call in any Cabinet Member or senior officer of the Council so that they can offer advice, support or answer any question that will assist the Committee in carrying out its functions.
- To carry out an external scrutiny function, particularly in relation to corporate issues and issues falling into the remit of a number of Overview and Scrutiny

Committees.

To fulfil all the functions of an overview and scrutiny committee as they relate to –

- the review, scrutiny and development of policy recommendations;
- the management of performance,
- the monitoring of progress against corporate priorities and
- the formulation of advice for the Cabinet, Council and other partners and stakeholders.

To have specific responsibility (but not limited to)

- Good governance
- The Budget Scrutiny function.

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2020

PRESENT: Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Steve Allsopp, Emma Bushell, Matthew Courtliff, Jim Grant, Brian Mattock, Barbara Parry, James Robbins, Carol Shelley, Roger Smith, Timothy Swinyard and Vera Tomlinson.

Also in attendance were: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills), Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults and Health), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment), Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning), Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence), Vinay Manro and Jane Milner-Barry.

61. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. The following declarations were made:

- Councillor Matthew Courtliff made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as he is employed by Network Rail.
- Councillor Barbara Parry made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as she is employed by The Ridgeway School.
- Councillor Tim Swinyard made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as a member of West Swindon Parish Council.
- Councillor Steve Allsopp made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as a member of Central Swindon South Parish Council.
- Councillor Vera Tomlinson made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as a member of St Andrews Parish Council.
- Councillor David Renard made a personal and prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions), with particular reference to Minute 72. Wichelstowe Joint Venture - NHBC Guarantee, as a member of the Joint Venture Board.

62. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

63. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, a resident of Haydon Wick, asked a question relating to the proposed £4.8m budget virement from the museum and art gallery to the M4 Junction 15 improvements.

The Leader of the Council responded to the question at the meeting.

Mr Worman asked a subsequent question regarding the methods used for calculating the metrics which measure performance against Pledge 14 of the Council's Vision.

Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment) undertook to provide a written response subsequent to the meeting.

64. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 5th February 2020.

Minute 63. Budget 2020/2021 and Beyond (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillors Russell Holland (Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills), Penny and Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults and Health) responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- The reserves available for supporting the 2020/21 budget and beyond given the CIPFA resilience evaluation having judged the council as having a low level of reserves against the budget going forward.
- The financial modelling undertaken for the next three years of budget forecasts and whether external factors have been evaluated to see how robust any assumptions made are going forward. Further information from this analysis will be made available to members once completed.
- The decrease to the budget for waste and recycling in 2020/21 (with savings in the region of £2.2m having to be found) and the potential disruptions to waste collections as a result. The Committee noted that the national average is 80 on missed waste collections, and the Council is at 50, with missed collections usually being attributable to a shortage of Class 2 drivers.
- Other ramifications from missed waste collections such as litter, safety from suspicious packages, and pavements being blocked by waste bins.
- The vast majority of proposed savings coming from adults and children's social services, and the anticipated effects this will have on the vulnerable people receiving support.
- The upgrading to the national living wage for adult social care employees, with the effect on the central government grant being estimated at around £600k per 1% agreed. Details of the amounts involved were requested and will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 63 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

Minute 64. Capital Programme 2020/2021 (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Holland, Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning), Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) and Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Transport and the

Environment) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- The reasoning behind the £4.8m budget transfer to the improvement works at J15 of the M4 when it could, for example, be used to electrify the Council's transport fleet and help to reduce poor air quality across the town. The Committee noted that this junction is overdue an upgrade and is an essential piece of infrastructure required to deliver housing growth in the town. Improving it will also assist with reducing congestion and poor air quality.
- The Centre for Cities data, which indicate that approximately 5.2% of each death in Swindon could be partly attributable to PM2.5. The Council monitors this and the evidence is showing there is less in Swindon than in the background shown in the model used by DEFRA. The Committee agreed that a training session on air quality would be useful for all members to help understand these issues.
- The works to J15 being a Highways England scheme supported by S106 contributions from Badbury Park, a government grant, £3m from the Local Enterprise Partnership and £4.8m from this Council. The drawdown on borough funds will be done towards the end of the project with all other funds used first.
- The issue of S106 monies being recorded in the future capital budget programme when perhaps the work is already underway.
- The consultation planned for proposed works in the Rodbourne area, with Ward members having already been contacted.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 64 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Member Development Advisory Group be requested to consider the addition of a session on air quality to the member training and development programme.

Minute 65. Treasury Strategy Statement 2020/21 (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillor Holland responded to questions put by Councillor Steve Allsopp and the Chair on the following matters:

- The impact upon treasury management from the percentage point increase in the rate of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) and when members can expect to be advised of the outcomes of any review of this via the Cabinet budget monitoring process and Audit Committee.
- Other national funders, such as the Municipal Bonds Agency, which are potential alternatives to the PWLB.
- There not having been any occasions to date when unexpected situations have overcome the Council's reserves.
- The impact from any changes to business rates and the level of confidence that no demands will be placed on the Council's reserves as a result.

Resolved – That Minute 65 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 66. Housing Revenue Account - Rents and Charges 2020/21

Councillors Renard and Martyn responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Jim Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- The proposed £4m acquisition programme for 2020/21, the scope of which will include the purchase of all property types to help meet priority housing needs arising from homelessness and clients supported by Adult Social Care.
- The number of council houses lost to right to buy in the last three years compared to the number built.
- The number of repurchased properties that were previously right to buy properties, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- Opportunities for the Council to convert office buildings to quality social housing, working with the owners of vacant buildings. The Committee noted that the Local Government Association is lobbying for local authorities to have control over permitted developments.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 66 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

Minute 67. School Admission Arrangements 2021-22 and Home to School Transport Policy

The Chair requested that the way in which the current framework delivers an outcome to parents having difficulties with the staggering of school start / end times on second and third choice preferences be reviewed.

Resolved – That Minute 67 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 68. Swindon Pay Policy Statement (Minute for Confirmation)

Resolved – That Minute 68 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 69. Transfer of the Community Meals Service to AGE UK Wiltshire

Councillors Penny and Ford responded to questions put by Councillor James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- The potential effect on other council services as a result of this transfer.
- The assurances given by the new provider that it will not be raising costs to service users in the near future. The Committee noted that the Council will continue to monitor the service provision, and that using AGE UK will expand the service and help more vulnerable people.
- The arrangements being put in place to monitor those individuals using this service and for reporting any issues to the Council.
- That the service would come back in-house should AGE UK suddenly be no longer able to provide it.

Resolved – That Minute 69 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 70. Transfer of Parish Services to Parish Councils

Councillor Penny responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Matthew Courtliff, Timothy Swinyard and the Chair on the following matters:

- That officers have experience of the statutory processes involved with TUPE transfers.

- Concerns that have been raised over the schedule of transfers, with contracts stating it will be a four month changeover period.
- The support that the Borough will provide to the four affected parishes to ensure staff are protected and there is no dip in service.
- That the parishes in question will have to decide whether to raise precepts to pay for these services. Parishes may also decide to work in partnership to share services and costs.

Resolved – That Minute 70 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 71. References from Other Council Bodies - Health and Wellbeing Board

Councillors Ford and Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) responded to questions put by Councillors Matthew Courtliff, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, Barbara Parry, Timothy Swinyard and the Chair on the following matters:

- The framework and resources being put in place and the 101 actions being taken by officers, required as part of adopting the Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy.
- The £1.7m cost associated with a person committing suicide and the mechanisms that could be put in place to help improve preventative measures. The Committee noted that suicide rates in Swindon are lower than national and regional averages so prevention work is already helping.
- The links with external organisations and other services such as housing to help identify those at risk of becoming suicidal in the future.
- The importance of councillors being aware of suicide and of how to signpost residents to support. It was agreed that a training session for members would help improve knowledge and skills in this area.
- The support and help in place for a person's family who has committed suicide.
- That additional funds have been allocated to the Trailblazer Programme, which provides additional mental health services via schools, and it is being launched on Thursday 12th March 2020.
- The accredited mental health first aiders in place for staff.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 71 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Member Development Advisory Group be requested to consider the addition of a session on suicide awareness to the member training and development programme.

(3) That information regarding the Swindon Trailblazer Mental Health Support Teams Service Launch will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Minute 72. Wichelstowe Joint Venture - NHBC Guarantee

The Leader of the Council declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item and left the room during the discussion.

Councillor Sumner responded to questions put by Councillors Matthew Courtliff, Roger Smith and the Chair on the following matters:

- That officers have considered the indemnity and are confident that the risk of exposure for the Council is low. The Committee noted that the joint venture uses sub-contractors for a number of works, and there is a right of redress if there is a failure of quality on those works.

- How the proposal is for the Council to indemnify jointly with the joint venture partnership for two years only, with the usual National House-Building Council (NHBC) warranty in place for the remaining eight years, giving an underlying benefit to the Council of not losing around £1.2m on the land value that would be lost if the full NHBC warranty was bought at market rates.
- The levels of confidence in the joint venture partnership, and in the ability of the Council to mitigate risk in partnership with this national house builder.

Resolved – That Minute 72 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 73. Land in Central Swindon

The Committee resolved that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in this item, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Councillor Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre) responded to a question raised by Councillor James Robbins regarding the updated information, which had been circulated at the Cabinet meeting.

Resolved – That Minute 73 of the Cabinet be noted.

65. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment

Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment), was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of the service areas within her portfolio of responsibility.

The key objectives and role of the Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment are to:

- 1) Provide the strategic direction for the Council's StreetSmart, rubbish collection, and recycling services.
- 2) Set the priorities for the maintenance of the highways network.
- 3) To provide overall political leadership for the Demand Management within the portfolio.
- 4) Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

The Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment has the following delegated responsibilities:

- Traffic and Transport Forward Planning (including Local Transport Plan and Implementation of Local Transport Plan).
- Strategic Highways & Maintenance Works.
- Car Parks and Bus Gates.
- Building community capacity.
- Public Transport (including Concessionary Fares, Specialist Transport, Council Transport and Fleet Management).
- Political oversight of Waterside Depot, including Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Recycling and Refuse Collection – Domestic & Trade.
- Waste Disposal / Waste Minimisation.

- Street Lighting [maintenance and strategic].
- Street Cleaning including removal of graffiti and abandoned vehicles.
- StreetSmart.
- Public Toilets.
- Ground & Tree Maintenance and open spaces.
- Parks (StreetSmart services only).
- Playgrounds, including those that are not presently utilised.
- Maintenance of Roundabouts and non-HRA verges.
- Building & Engineering.
- Building Services, cleaning, catering & security services.
- Gullies and drainage, minor road repairs, potholes.

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Transport and the Environment is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's Vision:

- Pledge 3. Refresh and implement the Masterplan for Swindon Town Centre, supporting our vision that Swindon is a vibrant, modern place. We will do this through delivering improvements to the strategic town centre transport network.
- Pledge 5. Enhance Wellington Street as a prime thoroughfare for the town.
- Pledge 14. Encourage Swindon residents to increase recycling and reduce their waste in line with the Council's Waste Strategy. Swindon Borough Council to reduce the use of single use plastics with the intention to stop using such plastics by 2019/20 and encourage local businesses to do the same.

Councillor Penny responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Emma Bushell, Matthew Courtliff, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, Vinay Manro, Jane Milner-Barry, James Robbins, Carol Shelley, Timothy Swinyard, Vera Tomlinson and the Chair on the following matters:

- How missed collections are classified using industry standards, allowing for comparisons with other authorities.
- That where a number of waste bins were not collected and the reason why is known (such as a blocked road for example), it is not counted as missed collections. Information is then placed on the website to advise those residents about what to do and when their bins will be collected. The Committee noted that unjustified missed collections are where householders have put their bin out late, or it is contaminated, and so it has not been collected.
- How information on why a particular bin is not collected is fed back to householders via notes through their door or stickers placed on bins, or by speaking to the caretaker or housing company in blocks of flats. Waste Wardens will also pay visits when there are reoccurring issues.
- The plans for achieving a 50% recycling rate by the end of the current year which includes food waste collection being rolled out across Swindon, stronger enforcement on the compulsory recycling policy introduced in 2019, and improved communications to residents on waste and recycling.
- The current Council policy to collect recycling bins that contain mixed waste, with advisory notes being placed on them asking for separation.
- The work currently being undertaken to review school safety zones across the Borough, the outcome from which is expected to be available by the end of February 2020.

- The consideration being given to installing posts that contain electric vehicle charging points within them as part of the proposals to upgrade street lanterns to LEDs across the Borough.
- That the pothole fund has been retained by government, and that the Council has been successful so far in securing grant funding across the highways and transport portfolio for strategic projects and maintenance. The Committee noted that should future funding become available officers will seek to exploit those opportunities.
- The risk based approach taken to asset management – in particular highway condition – to respond to unexpected issues requiring maintenance work (beyond potholes) and to prioritise work accordingly.
- The work being currently undertaken to review the Council's highways assets with the aim of creating a risk and condition ranked asset register, logged on to the newly procured electronic asset management system.
- The review currently underway on the Council's car parks, looking in particular at how car parking can enable the wider objectives for town centre regeneration, the findings from which are expected in May 2020.
- How pricing mechanisms (calculating a price and usage to give an optimum figure) are currently only in place for multi-storey car parks.
- The planned audit of on street parking opportunities as part of the review of the car parking strategy within the town centre to ensure that any proposals are evidence based.
- That the Council is not currently lobbying government for the introduction of means testing for free bus passes.
- How information breaking down what happens to all waste, including recycling collected from households, will be made available soon.
- That Dial A Ride did not bid for the new contract for community transport services which has instead been awarded to Access. It has committed to offering the same operating hours and no change of service to its wheelchair users. The Committee noted that as part of the tender assessment process Access confirmed it will keep its vehicles in a secure off road area, and written confirmation that this is happening will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- Whether the fastest 15% of vehicles are counted when compiling data on average speeds on a given road, information on which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The zero impact on recycling rates from introducing charges for recycling boxes, and the responsibility for bearing the cost of a replacement when a box is damaged.
- How all plastics collected (in the correct single use bag) are sent to Thamesdown to be recycled, with none going in to a Refuse Derived Fuel Plant or being sent abroad. The Committee noted that the single use plastic bag is used to enable the waste collectors to determine if contaminants are present, but that work done on the ten year plan for waste will look at this as part of the overall long term plan for plastics recycling.
- How the mixed product collected at kerbside (containing different types of plastic polymer) is low value, with additional costs also being generated from separation. The Committee noted that kerbside separation would achieve maximum value, and that awareness would have to be improved in the 22% of residents who do not currently know what can / cannot be recycled.

- The acquisition by the Council of an RT7000 machine to recycle plastics, which it is suggested could help reduce costs and also generate income.
- The consideration being given to government plans for taxing waste that does not include 30% recycled plastic, making manufacturers responsible for packaging throughout its lifespan, and preventing local authorities from shipping plastic waste abroad.
- How drivers are monitored via the trackers placed in all vehicles owned by the Council to ensure their and other road users safety.
- The first tranche of electric vehicles currently being introduced in to the Council's fleet.
- How a key message for residents is to recycle plastic bottles.
- The predicted timescales for the major projects planned for the A420 and the relocation of the rail station.

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

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

66. Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2019/2020 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 10th June 2019, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

67. Status of Requests for Action and / or Information

The Committee received an updated report advising on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information.

Resolved – That the report on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information be noted.

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Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16th March 2020

Author: Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out details of finance related elements of the portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills.
- 1.2 A key purpose of the Scrutiny Committee function is to hold the Cabinet to account and ensure that Council priorities and performance are being delivered. The Scrutiny Committee partly fulfils this requirement through the use of question and answer sessions with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Question and Answer session is to ensure that the Cabinet Member provides the Scrutiny Committee with performance information relative to their portfolio responsibilities. It also requires the Cabinet Member to provide budget information for their portfolio responsibilities and provides an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions on the portfolio responsibilities.
- 1.4 The remit of the Committee includes the review, scrutiny, and development of policy recommendations and the monitoring of performance of corporate priorities.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills;
- 2.2 Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member;
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Finance is Councillor Russell Holland who is accountable for the following finance related Pledge from the Council's Vision:
 - 3.1.1 Pledge 17. Provide early support so that Swindon residents are financially included and avoid getting into debt.
- 3.2 The finance-related Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position are as follows:

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Mick Bowden, 07392 109917, mbowden@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16th March 2020

3.2.1 Annual Budget (Revenue and Capital Programme)

3.2.2 Finance Management Overview

3.2.3 Medium Term Financial Plan

3.2.4 Commercial Investment Fund

3.2.5 Disposal of Assets

3.2.6 Swindon Housing Company

3.2.7 Revenue and Benefits Services

3.2.8 Welfare and Benefits Policy

3.2.9 Strategic Procurement

What have you done well?

Delivering The Council's Vision and Pledges

3.3 In support of the pledge 17 the following work has been undertaken:

3.3.1 Text reminder and telephoning of residents in arrears of their Council in order to offer support has continued to reduce the number of summonses that could be issued in 2018/19 1,769 summonses were prevented and between April 2019 and January 2020 another 729 were prevented.

3.3.2 Continued to publicise the work of Credit Unions and the Stop Loan sharks team.

3.3.3 Established a Social Enterprise Network (SEN), which holds regular meetings between Social Enterprises and the wider community in order to promote growth of existing Enterprises and the establishment of new organisations and joint working between them. These are non-profit making, sustainable businesses that create positive social and environmental impacts. They also have an "historical record" of helping and assisting those furthest from employment into employment. Further to this the SEN supports other businesses and charities to achieve social and/or environmental impact. Advice is also given to help charities to increase their income or reduce their costs. An example is Ipsum, who are a mental health charity. The SEN has worked with them to increase their income and help support themselves. This work resulted in an income increase of circa. £18,000 per annum for the charity.

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16th March 2020

- 3.3.4 The Social Enterprise Network (SEN) held a successful annual conference in October 2019 at the Link Centre at the same time as the Swindon Community Fair.
- 3.3.5 Financial Inclusion Seminars continue to be held, which provide guidance to those that support vulnerable adults and networking opportunities.
- 3.3.6 Support to benefit claimants transferring to Universal Credits and those households who are benefit capped, has continued through budgeting support providing by Citizens Advice and the Libraries helping claimants to make claims online and provision of Job clubs. The payments of Discretionary Housing Payments also assist these households maintain their tenancies.
- 3.3.7 The Council's Family Workers have continued to refer clients to the Money Mentoring programme administered by Swindon Citizen Advice. The service provides a comprehensive financial analysis including debt, benefit eligibility and household budgeting. During the period April to December 2019 £360,517 of potential new income, savings and debt write-off were identified with £93,011 having been verified as attained.

Achievements during the Year

Finance and Procurement

- 3.4 The audit of the statement of accounts for 2018/19 was completed by July 2019. In a challenging year for the sector nationally only around 60% of audits were completed on time. As one of the Council's that was within the timescale that reflects well on the Council's financial management arrangements. Feedback from the external auditor to the Audit Committee highlighted that continued improvement in the quality of the accounts and working papers and a particularly strong performance in the quality of the year end returns for Housing Benefit, Teachers' Pensions and the Pooling of Housing Capital Receipts.
- 3.5 The Council received an unqualified value for money opinion and continues its strong record of financial management and keeping within its overall budget at a time of pressures on local government finances generally, including demand pressures on social care in particular.
- 3.6 The team has provided support to all of the Swindon programmes themes and has supported the approach taken over the past two years to deliver over £30m of savings required. The support to Children's Services has continued to build on the investment made in the last two budgets and develop further the robust monitoring arrangements to track a very challenging situation.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Mick Bowden, 07392 109917, mbowden@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16th March 2020

3.7 The Council's approach to developing its capital strategy continued through the year, in line with the approach approved at the Council meeting in February 2019. This enabled a more comprehensive medium term capital programme to be presented to Cabinet and Council meeting in February this year.

3.8 Cabinet has approved the purchase of two commercial properties within the borough at a cost of £18.4m which will contribute an annual gross return of £1.2m to the Council. The surplus from these purchases has been used to help fund core council services.

Revenues and Benefits

3.9 The in-year Council Tax Collection rate increased from 96.38% in 2017/18 to 96.45% in 2018/19. Ultimately a 99.0% collection rate is being achieved for most financial years, although the changes to Council Tax Support (Benefits) in 2013 and the introduction of Universal Credits may impact this. As at the end of March 2019 the collection rate achieved for each previous financial years were as follows:

	Collection Rate (Excluding Credits)
2012/13	99.03%
2013/14	98.89%
2014/15	98.84%
2015/16	98.76%
2016/17	98.56%
2017/18	98.02%

3.10 A full review of Council Tax discounts has been undertaken and as at the end of February 2020 29,328 households were receiving a single person discount, which is 1,100 lower than shown at the end of August 2019 and this equates to an additional £450,000 of Council Tax falling due each year.

3.11 Business Rates collection was maintained at 98.7% in both 2017/18 and 2018/19.

3.12 A Business Rates retail relief scheme has been implemented during 2019/20 offering small and medium sized shops, cafes, restaurants and public houses a 33.3% reduction in their rates bills, again subject to state aid reliefs. This

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discount was automatically applied to those businesses that the Council believed would be eligible and 540 businesses were issued bills in April 2019 showing the 33.3% reduction. The value of the reduction granted was £1,581,319. In 2020/21 in accordance with the Central Government announcement the Council are looking to increase this reduction to 50% and also grant. Public Houses will also benefit from a further reduction of £1,000, but again this subject to a rateable value limit of £100,000 and state aid allowances.

What would you do differently?

- 3.13 The timings around the budget process were constrained, particularly due to the timing of the General Election. This meant that development of the budget for 2020/21 was later than it would normally be and the opportunity for wider engagement was limited.
- 3.14 The delays to the Spending Review and the implementation of new arrangements for the distribution of local government funding have also led to uncertainty regarding the development of the Council's longer term financial planning.
- 3.15 It is planned to review and bring forward the planning timetable during 2020 to ensure the position can be improved in respect of future years.

What are the Challenges facing your Portfolio?

- 3.16 Revenues & Benefits will continue working on providing support to Universal Credit claimants and preventing summonses and reducing bailiff referrals for Council Tax. Financial inclusion work to help low income households and encouraging Social Enterprises will also continue. The Central Library will continue to support Benefits claimants to make claims and job applications online and the running of 'job clubs.' Citizens Advice continue to support Universal Credit claimants directly at the Job Centre. Monitoring of collection rates for local taxation will continue to see if they are impacted by the changes to welfare benefits.
- 3.17 The existing Revenues and Benefits contract expires on 31 March 2023. The commissioning strategy for the services delivered under this contract will be progressed during the year.
- 3.18 The financial pressures on local authorities will continue and the Council's approach will seek to:

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- 3.18.1 Extend further the financial planning horizon to prepare the organisation for the challenges ahead, including the Council's capital strategy;
 - 3.18.2 Engage with the development of the new funding arrangements for 2021/22 onwards to ensure that Swindon's interests are protected and that local decisions are taken with the best information of their impact;
 - 3.18.3 Maintain financial stability through effective decision making to ensure a focus on our essential services.
- 3.19 Managing the budget in the forthcoming financial year will require rigorous monitoring of spending and tracking of the delivery of planned savings.
- 3.20 There is significant support required across the finance and procurement teams for a number of high value and complex projects and infrastructure schemes.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Committee can choose not to operate a Cabinet Portfolio Question and Answer session system.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act requires every local authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor, and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by it.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment is required at this stage. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

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Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The author has consulted, where appropriate, with Corporate Directors, Heads of Service, and other officers, on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None.

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