

BUDGET CONSULTATION - NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS

TUESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2019

PRESENT: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council) and Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Finance).

Swindon Borough Council: Mr Mick Bowden (Director of Finance).

Representatives of Swindon Non-Domestic Rate Payers: Mr Steve Bizley (JLL), Roger Shakles (Sewcraft Swindon Ltd), Di Powell and Rachael Youd (inSwindon BID Company Ltd), Justin Britchford (MECA) and Malcolm Gregory (Royds Withy King).

Apologies for absence were received from: Nik Hayward (Lazy Frog (UK) Ltd), Anne McCulloch (Sweets Galore), Zoe Pontin and Darren Bien (Thomas Cook UK & Ireland), Bryan Davis (Green Labyrinth), Jane Stewart (The Brunel), Vince Ayris (Vince Ayris Ltd), Jennie (Tiffins Swindon), Nalni Sorr (Swindon resident), Stuart McNeil (Bevirs), Geraldine Smith (Coate Water Care Co. Ltd), Manni Madhani and Colleague - name unknown (Bardolino), Hayley Williams and Alex Yarde (Soul Shack).

1. Welcome

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, welcomed the invited representatives of local businesses to the meeting.

2. Budget Update

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Finance, opened the meeting, explaining that the meeting was part of the Council's statutory duty to consult annually with non-domestic rate payers on its budget proposals. He advised that the meeting was intended to inform local businesses of the Council's projected outturn for 2018/19 and the financial context for setting the budget to March 2020. He referred to the report that was to be considered by the Council's Cabinet on 6th February 2019 and then by Full Council on the 21st February 2019. He confirmed that any comments made by the business representatives at the meeting would be submitted at both meetings for consideration.

Councillor Holland outlined the Council's Budget proposals for 2019/20, placing these in the context of the Council's known financial pressures and challenges. In particular, he drew the meeting's attention to the following:

- The reduction in grant from Central Government and its adverse effect on the budget.
- That Currently 80% of the Council's budget was earmarked for Adult and Children's Social Care Services.
- The impact on the Adult Social Care budget due to the change in Swindon's demographics such as increase in longevity and the need for greater support

with health and complex conditions.

- The increased investment in Children's Services in order to continue supporting vulnerable children appropriately.
- The Council's inability to amend business rates as these were set by Central Government.
- The proposed Council Tax increase of 3.99%.

Councillor Holland advised that a number of initiatives were being implemented aimed at town centre regeneration, including Kimmerfields and the refurbishment of the Carriage Works for small to medium businesses.

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, stated that this had been the most challenging Budget to date, expanding on the various challenges faced by the Council as a result of the economic conditions facing the country generally and local government in particular.

Following the introductory remarks, Councillor Holland, supported by the Council's Director of Finance, responded to questions and comments put by the representatives at the meeting on the following points:

- The business rates are set by Central Government, based on the valuation of the property
- That currently 50% of business rates are returned to Central Government, rather than being utilised for local investment purposes.
- That the Council, in conjunction with Wiltshire Council, had submitted a bid requesting the retention of a higher percentage of the rates for local investment and that this bid was unsuccessful.
- The Council is proposing to increase the Council Tax premium on domestic properties unfurnished and unoccupied for over two years.
- Concerns about the impact of Brexit and how any attributable increase in council tax levels would impact Swindon residents and businesses.
- The cost of social services provision and the Council's statutory duty to ensure the provision of high quality social services for its residents.
- The support provided to those residents in social housing who are experiencing financial difficulties.
- The creation of the Commercial Investment Fund to ensure funding was set aside to be spent on projects that would generate revenue.
- The "Help to Save Scheme" designed for those on lower incomes to encourage saving habits and to develop an emergency fund for unexpected situations.
- The opportunity to bid for a share of the £675m of funding for a new "High Street Fund" to assist with rejuvenation of High Streets.
- A proposal to review billboard advertising in local car parks and across the borough to generate revenue streams for the Council and help small businesses.
- Car parking charges within Swindon Town Centre.
- The proposed reduction of funding to the In Swindon Town Centre Bid.

In response to concerns regarding car parking charges, Councillor David Renard referred to past initiatives that were aimed to help businesses in Swindon Town Centre. He advised that discussions regarding parking charges were still being

undertaken and stated that whilst the Council was being open minded on a review of tariffs, any future initiative had to be cost neutral.

In response to an offer of collaboration from businesses, the Leader of the Council welcomed contributions and confirmed he was available and open to consider and discuss any proposals that would help business and the local community mitigate the current economic climate.

Councillor Russell Holland invited the business representatives to submit to Council any proposals they might have that would generate additional income or offset demand in other areas of the Council and subject to these being cost neutral.

3. Conclusion of the meeting

Councillor David Renard thanked the representatives of the business community and Non-Domestic Ratepayers for attending the meeting and expressed his hope that they found the meeting useful. He concluded by emphasising that over the next twelve months, the Council still faced considerable challenges which it had to meet to deliver the best outcomes for local residents and businesses.