

Leader's Annual Report to Scrutiny

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 15th July 2019

Author: Leader of the Council

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To allow the Leader of the Council to set out the Administration's record in the 2018/19 Municipal Year, as well as the strategic priorities for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.
- 1.2 To allow the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions about those priorities.
- 1.3 The body of the report contains references to a number of the Council's plans and policies and allows the Scrutiny Committee to discharge one of its functions under Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the Leader's comments about the strategic direction for the Council for the year ahead.
- 2.2 Put relevant questions to the Leader of Council.
- 2.3 Decide if any changes to the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes are required as a result of the progress report.
- 2.4 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

Achievements in 2018/19

- 3.1 This year's local elections were fought in a difficult environment because of the national pre-occupation with Brexit. The Conservative Group however, managed to cut through some of the negativity surrounding the national scene and focus on local issues ensuring it was returned with a larger majority. I would like to thank the retiring councillors across the parties for their time serving the people of Swindon: Toby Elliot, Claire Ellis, Fionuala Foley, Mary Friend, John Haines, Teresa Page, Chris Watts and Julie Wright. Similarly, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome Cllrs Nick Burns-Howell, Steve Heyes, Oladapo Ibitoye, Robert Jandy, Jenny Jefferies, Vinay Manro and Adorabelle Shaikh.
- 3.2 The Swindon Vision, Priorities, and Pledges remain at the heart of the Administration's activities and Members can visit the Council's website to monitor performance.

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3.3 I am particularly keen to focus on the part of the Vision that says 'a low-carbon environment with compelling cultural, retail and leisure opportunities and excellent infrastructure'. Following the earlier Motion to Council regarding Climate Change, and the thought provoking actions here in Swindon by young people concerned for the future of their planet, I am delighted to see the enthusiasm that is being put into the Council's new cross party Climate Change Working Group. The Group has already met twice and I am confident that it will stimulate wider debate on what we as a council can do to accelerate climate change mitigation here in Swindon.

3.4 Last year we refreshed our Pledges and there are a few areas that I would like to highlight:

3.4.1 Pledge 2 - With our wholly owned company, Public Power Solutions, enhance Swindon's reputation as a sustainable energy exemplar, by exploring technology that converts energy from waste, facilitating the move to electrified transport, and delivering opportunities to invest in renewable energy to reduce carbon footprint.

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) continues to use the Public Power Solutions (PPS) Solid Recovered Fuel/Refuse Derived Fuel facility as an outlet for waste disposal after reuse and recycling in order to send as little waste as possible to landfill. Currently, the percentage of Swindon's waste sent to landfill is less than 5% compared to a national average of around 21%.

However, new technologies are continually being researched, such as the conversion of waste into pellets for a greater application of energy from waste and the facilitation of Recycling Technology's research and development into the conversion of low-grade plastic waste to usable products remains a focus.

To this end, SBC and PPS are working closely to provide a renewable energy supply for the proposed introduction of electric vehicles to the Service fleet in 2019.

3.4.2 Pledge Thirteen - Find new ways to engage communities and neighbourhoods to increase the cleanliness of their local areas.

The appointment of three new Waste Wardens to bolster the EnviroCrime team in April 2019 has led to a robust anti fly-tipping campaign being launched with particular attention being given to those parts of the Borough experiencing high numbers of fly-tip incidents. To this end, specific measures, such as the introduction of CCTV and daily patrols from EnviroCrime Officers, as well as the distribution of communications to residents have been put in place.

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Further proposals, such as the trial of movement-activated, night-vision cameras and the pilot of gating rear alleyways are being undertaken to tackle the problem of fly tipping.

SBC also supports requests from Parish Councils for assistance with clean-ups with a recent High Street Cleaning Grant of over £30,000 being distributed across the Parishes for this purpose in April and May of this year.

As well as this SBC has a dedicated Education Liaison Officer who is undertaking the delivery of a waste reduction, increased recycling and anti-littering campaign to over 30 schools, targeting over 900 pupils in this academic year.

3.4.3 *Pledge Fourteen: 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.*

The introduction of this new pledge recognises the importance of the Borough making the requisite improvements in our recycling rate and is the key driver behind Swindon's Ten Year Waste Strategy written during autumn 2018 following extensive public engagement and approved by Cabinet in December 2018. The Waste Strategy is in line with the National Waste Strategy; "Our Waste, Our Resources; A Strategy for England" which was published in late December 2018 and sets out the pathway to achieving a 50% recycling rate for Swindon by 2020 with a target to achieve a 60% recycling rate by 2029, a year ahead of the national target.

The Pledge places waste reduction at the heart of all services and communications with residents, businesses, and communities in accordance with the Waste Hierarchy as well as supporting innovation in recycling and disposal treatment technology by extending the contract with Public Power Solutions to December 2045 to encouraging the investigation of new and emerging technologies (see Pledge Two).

Specifically, this had meant a budget of over £70,000 being allocated this year for a communications campaign currently underway to encourage residents to recycle more of the household waste they generate by promoting our easy to use services and promoting a circular economy to ensure that the use of materials collected for recycling are dealt with in the best environmental option available. This will be backed by the introduction of compulsory recycling in summer 2019 as well as the introduction of separate food waste collection trials in September 2019

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Finally SBC will be working with local business to encourage greater waste reduction and recycling practices, both within their own business activities, by taking the lead in eliminating the use of single-use plastics within the Council offices.

3.3.4 Pledge 5: Enhance Wellington Street as a Prime Thoroughfare for the Town

The Council has overseen the design and implementation of a publicly funded public realm and highway improvement scheme at Wellington Street, which reached practical completion in June 2019. Wellington Street is the main public thoroughfare linking the railway station to the town centre. The public realm in this area had deteriorated over time, and wayfinding to Swindon's retail and civic centre from the railway station had become unclear.

The Wellington Street scheme is now complete and includes new, separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians; a new, raised road with contrasting surfacing and sharper road markings; a safer junction where Wellington Street meets Milford Street and Manchester Road, with ramps to slow down vehicles and bikes, and tactile paving around the kerb line and new zebra crossing over Wellington Street with a new toucan crossing over Milford Street

Significant unforeseen challenges were encountered during the work, but sound and proactive project management and communication with local residents, businesses and the taxi trade ensured that the scheme was able to progress with as little disruption as possible, and feedback has been generally positive. Wellington Street now has a smarter, more pleasurable feel, with less clutter of street furniture.

3.3.5 Pledge 15: Work to secure a viable and sustainable future for our key heritage assets

I am delighted to confirm that Swindon has been successful in securing funding to develop projects in the Railway Heritage Area by working in partnership with Historic England, the National Trust and civic interest groups. I have taken a particular interest in this initiative and was thrilled when the area was formally launched as a Heritage Action Zone in June – a designation that brings together sector experts to take forward key projects to enhance this nationally important heritage asset.

In addition, Cabinet agreed to a new Pledge ensuring that our existing museums are more closely linked to our schools and utilised as an educational resource. This pledge will be delivered through developing our successful education programme at STEAM into other venues, such as Lydiard and the Museum and Art Gallery.

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3.3.6 Pledge 6f: Ensure that there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent

During 2018/19 the Council delivered an additional 70 homes to its Council housing stock. These included two new developments of family housing off Penhill Drive and a development of 1 bedroom flats on Cranmore Ave. Homes England, who part fund the Council's development programme, awarded the Council the highest audit rating possible for its development work. In addition, during the year, the Council enabled a further 186 affordable homes in partnership with housing associations and housing developers

3.3.7 Pledge 26: To prevent homelessness wherever possible, including using additional measures such as the temporary winter housing provision and offering a day centre to prevent rough sleepers from returning to the streets.

Rough Sleeping numbers in the town have fallen from a high in 2017 of 45 to 23 in a recent census. The Haven is fully operational providing a hub for services to support the homeless.

Thanks to the dedication and commitment of the SBC officers and their colleagues across the voluntary sector, the unique and bold offer of the Temporary Winter Provision operated for its second year. The work was recognised as an outstanding achievement and acknowledged in the National Chartered Institute of Housing Awards as a Finalist in 2019.

3.3.8 Pledge 6: Strategic Development

Progress continues on the strategic urban extensions with Tadpole Garden Village and Badbury Park having additional areas within their boundaries consented for housing. Both are now approaching completion, with community facilities also coming forward.

The search for additional smaller scale sites for housing through the SHELAA (Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment) process was led by Cllr Gary Sumner and provided good debate. A number of deliverable sites were identified and can be taken forward through the Local Plan Review.

3.3.9 Pledge 10: secure a range of options to access Higher Education

The Royal Agricultural University Swindon, to be based at the Carriage Works will open its doors to its first students in January 2020 with courses in Cultural Heritage. The Council has also worked with Swindon College to submit a bid and secure funding for an Institute of Technology which will deliver university level courses to over 1300 learners from 2021.

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The Council, in partnership with the SWLEP has delivered its first year of the Careers Hub. This pilot involving 17 of our school and college settings has increased the number of employers engaged in career learning and improved our performance in delivering careers education. We have been successful in securing additional funding for 2020/21 so that all our secondary school and college settings will be part of the pilot.

The Council outlined its commitment and ambition to ensure more young people with disability, health and care needs are able to access paid employment by 2022 through the Supported Employment Strategy. Work is progressing to implement the Strategy and more employers have committed to work placements or paid employment.

Challenges for the Year Ahead

- 3.4 We continue to take account of wider regional and national issues such as the creation of England's Economic Heartland and the country's decision to leave the European Union. I still firmly believe that our membership of the EHH will provide a platform to bid for access to government funding to support improved road and rail links to Oxford and beyond as far as Cambridge and even Norwich. This would help secure our economic advantages as part of the country's wealth creating hub.

3.4.1 Finance and continuing to deliver the Vision

We delivered our services within budget during 2018/19, despite the significant financial pressures within Children's Services. The commitment to funding Children Services was demonstrated by increasing the base budget for 2019/20 by more than £10m. The long-term financial sustainability of the Council is critical and it was an important achievement to deliver this investment in vital services without any new allocation of reserves to support the overall budget.

I reported in December that the Council's future funding would be determined by the new arrangements from April 2020. Since that report I have worked as part of the Fast Growing Cities Leaders' Group to ensure Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has been made aware of the key issues affecting Swindon which I believe should be considered in future funding decisions.

We are keeping Council Tax one of the lowest of any unitary authority and lower than many of our neighbours and I would take this opportunity to thank the SBC Comms Team who once again produced a colourful and informative Council Tax Booklet. I firmly believe that it is important to provide a clear overview of where and how our residents' money is spent.

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3.4.2 Delivering through Partnerships

Swindon, like all similar authorities, continues to face immense, rising, demand-led pressure in children's safeguarding, adult social care, and caring for those with learning difficulties. Ensuring that we provide the necessary support and stay within our financial means remains an ongoing challenge.

In all these areas, success will depend as much on our ability to work with partners as how well the Council manages its own services. It will be essential for our success that we continue to enhance our relationships with the police, schools, the hospital, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and the relevant charities and third sector groups in order to ensure that all residents are protected. An approach that assumes that the Council can do everything will not be successful.

The Council is partnering with Nationwide Building Society to build 239 homes on the former Oakfield Campus that has been derelict for 10 years. Included on this site will be a community hub and a good array of public open spaces.

3.4.3 School Provision

We pledged to build more schools to meet the needs of our growing population. We have continued to invest in new schools and I am delighted that the William Morris Primary School, located in the Tadpole Garden Village development in North Swindon, will open in September 2019 with an initial intake of 60 pupils into two Reception classes. It will reach its full complement of pupils by 2026. Also opening on site is a new nursery.

To the East, the Deanery CE Academy will also take its first cohort of secondary age pupils this September. The Academy will include a Sport England standard multi-use games area as well as an all-weather pitch designed to Sport England hockey standards. An impressive theatre space will also provide enhanced performing arts facilities.

3.4.4 Adult Services

The Better Care Fund (BCF) is one of the most ambitious programmes across the NHS and local government to date. It creates a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to work more closely together around people, placing their wellbeing as the focus of health and care services, and shifting resources into social care and community services for the benefit of the people, communities and health and care systems. Good progress has been made in implementing Swindon's BCF Plan 2018/19 to integrate community and acute pathways to improve outcomes for service users and carers.

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During 2018/19, people received more appropriate and timely information/advice at initial contact stage, assessments were more timely, the reablement service supported more people to return home to live independently so fewer people have been admitted to permanent care. SBC and CCG are working together to refresh the BCF plan for the year ahead.

In line with national and local priorities, integration of the CCG and SBC commissioning health and social care teams is underway. This will improve commissioning and contractual management oversight, support a whole system placed based approach to commissioning, reduce silo working and embed a standardised approach to contract management.

The service re-design programme continues to support more individuals to become less dependent. Planning Live is helping to embed a whole system person-centred approach to enable young people with disabilities to achieve their wishes and aspirations for adulthood, and the Transitions Team is working closely with colleagues in Children's Services to offer Planning Live to disabled young people in care and care leavers. The introduction of a new Supported Living Framework gives us a strong platform for developing appropriate services with a wider range of providers, some of whom are new to Swindon.

Members will have seen the latest policy announcements from the Government, including a new package of measures to tackle the injustices faced by disabled people in the workplace, at home and in the community. These new measures will help to break down barriers faced by disabled people, whether in employment, housing or elsewhere. I am proud that SBC and partners are committed to working together to ensure that disabled people get the support they need, and go as far as their talents can take them.

The safeguarding partners in Swindon are changing the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Children and Adults at Risk from end of July 2019. The new model, approved by Health and Wellbeing Board in March, focuses on continuous learning and improvement with a clear line of sight on frontline safeguarding practice. The Swindon Safeguarding Partnership will work to improve outcomes for both children and adults by ensuring that the views, needs and experiences of children and adults at risk and those that care for them, are central to safeguarding arrangements and processes. It will focus on early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats and ensure that information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and adults.

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There is a nationally recognised shortage of health visitors and we are no different. Whilst the council is actively attempting to recruit new health visitors, we are also enhancing the skills mix within the relevant teams and have developed Early Years Family Practitioner roles and Community Staff Nurses who are able to work with Health Visitors to support families. We are also looking to the future and offering funded training routes to “grow our own” Health Visitors.

3.4.5 Children Services

Cabinet has endorsed the strategic improvement plan for children's services and regularly monitor its delivery. The social work teams have been re-structured during the year so that there are small 'pods' of social workers and each social worker has less cases. This has achieved a commitment that Cabinet set. A dedicated team has been established to support children in care and a focused recruitment campaign has led to some Swindon families becoming foster carers for the first time. The Early Help Hub has been implemented in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and this is having a positive impact on providing early help to children and families. The Council has worked with its Partners, including the police, health and the voluntary sector to strengthen the joint arrangements across Swindon to help and protect children.'

As one of the most scrutinised area of the Council's business Children Services is currently undergoing an Ofsted inspection in the areas of Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers (ILACS).

3.4.6 Economic prosperity and Honda

The Council is a member of the Honda Swindon Task Force, convened by the Business Secretary, which has brought together civic leaders, local partners and MP's, Honda, leading government officials, union and sector representatives. The Task Force's priorities are to match the highly sought after skills of the workforce to local opportunities, provide support for the supply chain, identify future opportunities for the site and secure Swindon's continued economic growth. The work of the Task Force is supported by a Steering Group and local Task Groups coordinated by the Council.

Swindon continues to have one of the best-performing economies in the country, according the 2019 Centre for Cities Outlook report. The report provides an annual economic performance index of the 63 largest cities and towns in the UK. Amid continuing funding and demand pressures, we continue to play a vital role in encouraging private investment that creates local employment opportunities and delivers social gain.

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World leading financial company Zurich will build a new state-of-the-art office building in the heart of our town. We are also committed to supporting our partners and the business community in growing Swindon's economic resilience.

The Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) which is one of only 20 in the country, will boost Swindon's economic growth by using its heritage as a catalyst. Time and again, evidence shows that investment in historic places leads to increased business confidence, visitor numbers, and spend in the area. The HAZ will capitalise on the Railway Village's potential as a place rich in culture, leisure and wellbeing amenities and brings together many partners who share a passion for this precious heritage. We will continue to work together, pooling expertise, enthusiasm and resources.

Included in the exciting HAZ Delivery Plan will be the tangible improvements made to the Railway Mechanics' Institute. Work will be carried out on the poor physical condition of this building and its surroundings, to improve its prospects for a sustainable future.

3.4.7 Major Schemes

The New Eastern Village development continues to provide a significant challenge with progress made on up front infrastructure schemes now in the planning and design stage, and external funding secured, or applied for. Developers have acquired the sites at North and South Foxbridge and will be jointly Masterplanning the site in the coming weeks. The negotiations with land promoters and owners for the site at Lotmead are also progressing with a live application for 2,600 homes including primary schools and a sports hub. Outline consent has now been granted for 370 homes and a primary school at Redlands Airfield and another 2,400 homes are planned for Roborough, north of the A420 with S106 monies currently being finalised.

Our Town Centre Movement Strategy is aimed at the efficient movement of people and vehicles around the Town Centre, to avoid unsustainable and polluting queues. The Town Centre Movement Strategy is in progress and identifies six 'Priority Themes', including simplifying movement by car into and within the town centre; improving the integration of buses into the Town Centre; better connecting the cycle networks and walkable streets; accommodating and managing key vehicle movements to protect the central area; maximising the car parking offer and including complementary measures, such as a Park & Ride and the strategic cycle route, which extend beyond the Town Centre.

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North Star and the ambitious plans to put Swindon firmly on the map by providing a regional premium leisure destination will commence this year. North Star Village will see an indoor snow dome, the largest IMAX cinema in Europe, a 19 lane bowling alley and a wide range of shops, restaurants and parking.

Infrastructure improvements continue with a scheme to widen Mead Way, redesign the Moonrakers Junction, replacing the current bus station and creating a new bus boulevard.

3.4.8 Health and Leisure

We have extended the lease on the Health Hydro to allow Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to continue running the facility. The lease on the Rec has also been extended to bring the break clause date in line with all other SBC facilities. The Council is looking to spend £1.5 million over the next couple of years to deal with the backlog of maintenance issues. In the longer term, the sustainable future of the Hydro will be linked to the work of the Heritage Action Zone.

Lydiard continues to go from strength to strength. This year we have more weddings booked in, higher levels of occupancy in the Conference Centre and a host of events being offered. These include the Cheese and Chilli Festival, cream teas in the courtyard every afternoon, two Open Air Theatre productions, the Mfor Festival, Luna Cinema showings and a Wedding Show in the autumn. With improved Wi-Fi and the installation of EV Charging points, the venue is better used than it has been in its more recent past and is now operating at a budget surplus.

3.4.9 Estate Rationalisation

Part of the programme to make the council more modern, efficient and effective by 2020 is a rationalisation of the Council's estate. This forms part of the formerly agreed Swindon Programme of reducing the number of buildings that the Council operates from in order to lower its operating costs, improve service standards and encourage modern working practices. The project will continue in the coming year with office alterations in Watt Tyler ongoing together with the relocation of Childrens Services staff from the Lyndhurst Centre, Park North, Swindon ('the Lyndhurst Centre') and the Resource Centre, Gladstone Street Swindon ('the Resource Centre') to Civic Campus with provision of Family Contact services within either the Everleigh Centre or the Meadows, Penhill, Swindon. We will also be facilitating the asset transfers of the Lyndhurst Centre to the Goddard Park Academy Trust and the Resource Centre to the Central Swindon South Parish Council on a leasehold basis.

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3.4.10 Climate Change Impact

The Council has established a Climate Change Working Group whose mission is to work towards making Swindon Carbon Neutral by 2030.

In Swindon, we have a really positive story to tell about becoming more environmentally friendly, and as a Council, we are doing a number of things to play our part in protecting the planet.

The production of energy to meet rising consumption is a massive contributor to carbon emissions, and to counter some of that, we will continue to harness solar energy. There are a number of solar farms in Swindon and they are playing an ever bigger role in providing us with the energy we need.

Swindon Borough Council has its own sustainable energy company, Public Power Solutions (PPS). Some of the work that we are doing through PPS includes committing to a challenging vision to help deliver “A world of zero waste and clean, smart power”. PPS are currently developing 160MW of solar PV nationally, enough to power 40,000 homes - half the houses in Swindon and saving 60,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Our goal is that all Swindon's electricity should come from low-carbon sources by 2030.

Upgrades have recently been made to Swindon's much-loved cycling network, and we would always encourage people to think about greener ways of getting around the town. Going forward, we will be refreshing grants for wild flower areas and environmental improvement, and engaging in Community Forest and tree planting activities, to offset CO2 emissions, we hope to create an environment where people want to be out walking and cycling in our wonderful town.

The Council is an executive and founder member of the Hydrogen Hub, which launched in Swindon and Wiltshire in January 2016, and has driven external investment in hydrogen and fuel cell projects in the region. With PPS, we are developing 50MW of battery storage in Swindon, to help balance demand on the local electricity network and enable the delivery of more renewable energy projects.

Electric Vehicle charging is starting to have an impact on new developments and SBC will now be ensuring that any new policy includes 'active' EV charging infrastructure, which is installed immediately, and 'passive' infrastructure, which requires physical conduits to support future charging points, and the reservation of electrical capacity.

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It is great to see so many young people being passionate advocates for protecting the environment, and we look forward to working with them, and others, as we continue to develop more sustainable ways of living. Action against Climate Change must be embedded in all areas of the Council and we will work towards developing a greater awareness of the impact of Climate Change and making the adaptations necessary to mitigate against the single biggest challenge of our collective generations.

- 3.5 In moving Swindon forward, I am delighted to have a strong Cabinet team, which combines passion for delivery, as well as experience. The Members this year are:

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation and Education and Skills;

Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Operational Excellence;

Councillor Oliver Donachie, Cabinet Member for Economy and Place;

Councillor Gary Sumner, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning;

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for the Town Centre;

Councillor Maureen Penny, Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment;

Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Adults and Health;

Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services; and

Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

- 3.6 The details of the portfolios is attached at Appendix 1.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options; Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution requires the Leader to submit a report.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications in this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 The report author has considered legal and human rights legislation in the preparation of this report. It is considered that the report's recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

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- 5.3 The report author has considered whether any of the information contained in the report falls under the General Data Protection Regulations and has determined that the report does not contain personal data.

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

- 5.4 There are no specific issues in this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 Since the report does not recommend any changes in services, no Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) was undertaken.

Risk Management

- 5.6 Risk Management will form part of any formal decisions made by Cabinet. There are no specific issues relating to this report.

6. Consultees

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

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Executive Arrangements, 2019-2020.