

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

Author: Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.
- 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 Housing and Public Safety.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Question and Answer session is to ensure that the Cabinet Member provides the Scrutiny Committee with performance information that relates 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

Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.
- 2.2 Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety is Councillor Cathy Martyn who is accountable for the following Pledges from the Council's Vision:
 - 3.1.1 Pledge 6 (in part). Ensure that there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent.
 - 3.1.2 Pledge 12 (in part). Work with partners to promote healthy lifestyles for the people of Swindon

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.1.3 Pledge 16 (in part). Deliver a programme of work to ensure that residents, visitors and businesses feel that Swindon's town centre is a safe place to live, work, visit and do business
- 3.1.4 Pledge 26. To prevent homelessness where possible, using additional measures including the Temporary Winter Housing Provision and enabling a Day Centre to prevent rough sleepers from returning to the streets.
- 3.2 The Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position were updated in December 2016 and are as follows:
 - 3.2.1 Housing Allocations and Advice Services
 - 3.2.2 Empty Homes
 - 3.2.3 Estate and Tenancy Management
 - 3.2.4 Housing Enabling and Strategic Services
 - 3.2.5 Homeline Services
 - 3.2.6 Homelessness
 - 3.2.7 Housing Right to Buy/Sales Services
 - 3.2.8 Neighbourhood Wardens
 - 3.2.9 Private Sector Housing Renovation Grants
 - 3.2.10 Repair and Improvements to Council Housing Stock
 - 3.2.11 Sheltered Accommodation
 - 3.2.12 Environmental and Public Protection Services
 - 3.2.13 Gypsies, Travellers and Unauthorised Encampments
 - 3.2.14 Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse
 - 3.2.15 Control Room Operations
 - 3.2.16 Licensing, including taxis, etc.
 - 3.2.17 Community Safety Partnership
 - 3.2.18 Reducing Domestic Abuse

Update on current priorities and key achievements

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Michael Ash, Head of Housing, Communities and Housing, mash@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

Delivering The Council's Vision and Pledges

Pledge 6 (in part). Ensure that there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent

- 3.3 The Queens Drive site will see the complete demolition of the 1950's system built "Easiform" blocks replaced by 149 new homes, 129 of which will be at either affordable or social rents levels dependent on grant funding. Further sites in Ventnor Close, in Haydon Wick, Ashley Close in Walcot and Huntley Close in Walcot are now proceeding to formal planning applications. In addition, early consultations have started on 3 further sites which will be reported to Cabinet in the near future. In all, these sites amount to a development programme of well over 300 new affordable homes.
- 3.4 In addition work was completed on new council housing at sites on Penhill Drive and Cranmore Ave during 2019.
- 3.5 Work also continues in negotiating and delivering additional affordable housing with our partners as part of S.106 agreements. In the first two quarters of 2019/20 146 affordable homes were enabled, these are predominantly delivered by our housing association partners namely Aster, GreenSquare, Stonewater and Sovereign.

Pledge 12 Work with partners to promote healthy lifestyles for the people of Swindon and **Pledge 16** Deliver a programme of work to ensure that residents, visitors and businesses feel that Swindon's town centre is a safe place to live, work, visit and do business

- 3.6 The Licensing Committee has adopted a number of important policy documents over the last year. Amongst the most significant have been an updated Statement of Gambling Principles and a revised Street Trading Policy, both of which form material considerations when licences are applied for. The Statement of Gambling Principles helps to promote healthy lifestyles by ensuring gambling establishments are correctly licenced and that their licences include appropriate conditions to ensure that advice is provided around the dangers of compulsive gambling, and that an awareness of gambling addiction is promoted. The Street Trading Policy improves safe and vibrant activity in the town centre, whilst also ensuring that hot food vans are not sited close to schools in the future.

Pledge 26 To prevent homelessness where possible, using additional measures including the Temporary Winter Housing Provision and enabling a Day Centre to prevent rough sleepers from returning to the streets

- 3.7 The new Day Centre/ Homelessness Hub opened in January 2019 at the Haven with the lead agency being the Swindon Night Shelter. This has brought together

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

a range of statutory and voluntary services, all with the specific aim of reducing homelessness in Swindon. Swindon Night Shelter have also agreed to extend the lease on the building leased to them by the Council, this will enable the charity to receive longer term funding awards.

- 3.8 The Temporary Winter Housing Provision will run for its 3rd year this winter in premises next to The Haven. This year the lead agency will be The Swindon Night Shelter, the Council having previously taken the lead and enabled the development of a successful format. The performance of this project was recognised at the Chartered Institute of Housing 2019 National Housing Awards where it received acclaim as a Finalist, receiving recognition for being both innovative and collaborative. The considerable commitment of our volunteers was also praised.
- 3.9 The Council's wider and innovative approach to rough sleeping gained the positive interest of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, resulting in various grant awards of over £500k to combat rough sleeping. This money is being used to support a number of projects including extending the current out-reach service and providing "Housing First" flats for those sleeping rough.

Licensing

- 3.10 The work of the Licensing Committee has focused on taxis in the last year. A policy has been established to enable the front seats of Hackney carriages to be licensed to carry passengers, and more stringent controls over the use of voluntary CCTV in cabs has also been passed.. Additional policies establishing protocols around aspects of public safety in taxis have also been introduced. Alongside these measures, I have been keen to assist my other portfolio holders in ensuring that the taxi service is able to operate efficiently across Swindon's public highway network and am delighted that an initial pilot permitting hackney carriages, (the public transport element of the taxi fleet) to use bus gates has been successful with few complaints. The number of Hackney carriages in Swindon is not significant and consequently there has been no adverse impact on traffic flow through gates.
- 3.11 Continuing with taxis, the Licensing Manager has secured accreditation to provide training for licence holders and applicants on issues of Child Exploitation, safeguarding and *county lines* activities. This is really important as it ensures that our licensed drivers and applicants fully understand these issues and are able to act as our eyes and ears on the ground to ensure public safety.
- 3.12 The Licensing team continue to facilitate improvements to the town centre offer and contribute to the 'Enjoy Swindon, be Safe' initiative. The Licensing Manager

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

has also been instrumental in bringing continental Christmas stalls to the town centre and we work with our partners at In Swindon to ensure that the town centre is able to bring in good events that are properly licensed and take place in a safe environment.

- 3.13 The licensing team continues to undertake active investigations and monitoring of licensable activities, such as noise from licensed premises. As last year, the Licensing Manager has lead multi-disciplinary operations to ensure that taxi drivers comply with the requirements of their licences. These have once again proven successful in ensuring public safety. Licensing Tasking meetings continue bringing together our main strategic partners with updates taken to the Community Safety Partnership. These meetings have resulted in a vast reduction in the number of licence review applications being submitted by the Wiltshire Police, which is testament to our good working relationship.
- 3.14 Last summer, I was delighted to learn that our Animal Health function was once again awarded an RSPCA 'Gold' standard for its stray dog service. The award scheme was developed over 10 years ago by the RSPCA to recognise outstanding work carried out by local authorities, housing providers and other public service organisations, and to highlight those who have improved animal welfare and their communities. Dealing with stray dogs goes beyond just animal welfare, having a much wider impact on the community on matters such as street cleanliness, public protection and anti-social behaviour. The Council's licensing team have again assisted with compulsory micro-chipping, and undertaken regular proactive work to encourage responsible dog ownership. This has also included outreach work with schools to help children understand how to safely interact with dogs.
- 3.15 The Licensing Manager is also the Council's statutory Safety at Sports Grounds officer, chairing the Safety Advisory Group, and is fully trained in this field, holding the most recent accredited qualification. The main responsibilities of this role are around safety at and around Swindon Town football games. Our management of sports ground safety has recently been subject to an external audit and whilst we do not have full outcome as yet, indications around our leadership and management of risks and incidents are encouraging. The Licensing Manager also chairs the multi-agency Event Safety Advisory Group, which provides valuable advice and feedback on event management plans, and has undertaken a number of inspections at key events such as the M:For concert at Lydiard, community events and festivals like the Old Town Festival and Pride.

Public Protection

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.16 The Public Protection team continue to work to support and protect local residents, and acts across a wide range of public health determinants and statutory functions.
- 3.17 The Health Compliance team aims to encourage and support local businesses and organisations large and small to comply with requirements in statutory areas including Food Hygiene, Food Standards and Health & Safety. The team has entered into a Primary Authority partnership with WH Smith and are in the process of providing assistance to them in reviewing their documented systems. The team also work with our other Primary Authority partners.
- 3.18 Officers work tirelessly in the pursuit of good standards of food hygiene and have been responsible for some high profile prosecutions of both local premises and also food stored and prepared domestically which was unfit for human consumption and destined for human consumption. As part of the digitisation initiative the team has developed and implemented a series of online forms to modernise and streamline food business registrations and complaints from members of the public and businesses.
- 3.19 Despite significant recruitment issues the Trading Standards team has taken a number of important enforcement actions this year. These actions inevitably focus on Rogue Trading, but it has also played an important role in a joint illegal tobacco operation recently that led to the removal of 335,000 illegal cigarettes, 92kg of illegal tobacco, and 25 litres of illegal alcohol from the streets of Swindon. These materials had a duty value in excess of £150,000, and one vehicle was also seized as part of the operation.
- 3.20 Other notable Trading Standards work includes a rogue trader prosecution which both punished the offender with a 9 month prison sentence, suspended, and secured almost £18,000 compensation for the victims.
- 3.21 The Healthy Neighbourhoods team are well advanced in licensing the Borough's Houses in Multiple Occupancy under the extended scheme. The extension to the mandatory licensing scheme now means that that all HMOs with 5 or more residents, irrespective of the number of storeys, require a licence to operate legally. Much work was done to trail that to local landlords, and the great majority have as a result applied for a Licence without the need for enforcement.
- 3.22 Now that the majority of HMO licence applications are processed; the team have moved onto identifying and pursuing those that have not voluntarily applied. The new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy will guide how that enforcement is progressed, and a number of the new Civil Penalties are expected to be imposed in the coming months.

Air Quality

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Michael Ash, Head of Housing, Communities and Housing, mash@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.23 The Air Quality Action Plan for Kingshill, Old Town containing 18 clear actions to improve air quality, has been endorsed by Cabinet, and we are in the process of finalising the plan with DEFRA. Some of the simpler actions are already in train. One major action; that of putting in place a Traffic Regulation Order to prohibit heavy vehicles from Kingshill, is well into the planning stage, and this action is expected to remove up to 30% of the excess Nitrogen Dioxide from that road.
- 3.24 A grant bid to fund work on some actions is in the drafting, but more funding will be required whether that bid is successful or not.
- 3.25 In the meantime, further monitoring and modelling work will be done to inform the Plan, and the Public Protection team has also extended its network of routine monitoring devices to increase its awareness and understanding of current or emerging air quality issues around the Borough. This will be reported through the Annual Status Report to DEFRA.

Housing

- 3.26 **Homelessness** The Housing First Team is now fully established and 15 clients have successfully been housed, taking clients directly off the streets or via the Temporary Winter Housing Provision. All Housing First tenancies are running well without any need for tenancies to come to an end. The Homelessness Prevention Team are now present in additional work areas including Great Western Hospital and the Children's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. In addition and working with the Accommodation Team, they have enabled the portfolio of privately leased temporary accommodation units to be reduced from 250 to 215 since April 2019. The Council is awaiting details of external grant funding for 2020/21 for all future projects and prevention work.
- 3.27 A new Rough Sleeper reduction Strategy was agreed by the Health and Well Being Board and Cabinet in 2019. This strategy endorses work already in place and referred to earlier in the report.
- 3.28 **Tenancy Management.** An ongoing challenge continues to be rent collection. The income of the Housing Revenue Account to meet tenants' service aspirations depends on a high rate of collection. The collection rate for 19/20 is on target to recover 98% of rent owed. This continues to be a remarkable achievement given the on-going changes to the Welfare System.
- 3.29 A review is also underway of how the Sheltered Housing Service operates moving forward. Currently the Council operates a service with live-in Sheltered Housing Officers. However, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit to these posts and the value of a "live-in" service, when officers are off duty out of hours is arguably an inefficient use of resources. The consultation with tenants and staff includes an option to move to a *cluster* model where a team of Sheltered Housing

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

Officers will manage a group of neighbouring schemes. The proposal identifies savings of £150,000 per annum.

- 3.30 **Fire Safety** remains a priority. The Grenfell tragedy rightly continues to place a spot light on the Council's processes and procedures. Work has been completed at the DMJ Tower where new fire doors, additional smoke detectors and intumescent fire grills have been installed as well as an upgrade to the lifts. In the 6 x 10 storey blocks, additional internal fire doors have been fitted, a fire suppression system has been installed at George Hall Court (sheltered housing). Escape and emergency lighting has been fitted to 28 x medium rise blocks. The Council continues to work closely with the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, and conducts joint training events on key aspects of fire safety management with Housing staff.
- 3.31 Part 1 of the Grenfell Report has recently been published. Within the recommendations, there is as a call for national guidelines to be developed on carrying out partial or total evacuations, local Fire Services have also been requested to do so. The Housing Service are working with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service on how "*stay put and prepare to evacuate*" policies are being developed. Current arrangements have not been changed and existing advice to residents remains in place. This advice is based on regular risk assessments of our high rise buildings.
- 3.32 **Void Management.** This is the work undertaken to return properties back into use after a tenancy has ended. In 2017 the contract for these works were re-let, the successful tenderer being the Bell Group. Unfortunately for a number of reasons this contract performed poorly leaving a considerable legacy.
- 3.33 Through a combination of excellent work from the in-house work force and the direct management of two subcontracting teams that worked for Bell, the Council made significant improvements in turnaround time. The Council has also re-let Voids works to a number of smaller locally based contractors and maintained the work of its in-house team. As part of the Service's Improvement Plan a range of operational changes are in place to improve this service even further, including the established of a dedicated cross service Voids team. When I reported earlier in the year (February 2019) to this committee, 150 properties were empty, the service is now on target for this to be 100 or less by Christmas. There will always be a number of properties empty for a variety of reasons, for example 20 properties can become empty in just one week, many of which will need substantial repairs. With a stock size of approximately 10,300 homes, 80 to 100 void at any one time is comparable with good performing peers.
- 3.34 **Housing Repairs and Improvements.** The responsive Repairs Service is also under going considerable service improvements to deliver higher rates of
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Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

customer satisfaction. This includes a more efficient purchasing/stores function, improved ways of managing waste disposal from site, transferring more responsive work to planned improvements. This programme of improvements will be imbedded over the next 12 months. Alongside this and as part of new ways of working introduced by commissioning a new Housing (IT) operating system, the “My Tenancy” online offer has been extended to cover repairs reporting. From month to month in 2019 the percentage of repairs has been steadily climbing (with the exception of September), 30% plus of all repairs are reported in this way. Following additional system improvements to the portal it is hoped to double its uptake during 2020.

- 3.35 As part of the Tenancy Standard regulated by Homes England, the Council is required to keep its stock to what is known as the Decent Homes Standard. This standard is designed to enable tenants to have a reasonable level of comfort benefitting from modern fittings. As at 1 October 2019 99.93% of the Council’s housing stock complied to this standard. This is an excellent result. The reason for a small number of homes not meeting the standard is down to tenant preferences to not have the work completed, for example not wishing to have a central heating system. Where this occurs the Council upgrades the property once it becomes void.
- 3.36 **Training and professionalisation of the work force.** The Grenfell tragedy has also rightly underlined the importance of maintaining a trained and suitably qualified workforce to implement Council housing policy and manage a range of high risk housing management functions. Swindon’s professional membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing continues to be higher than any other local authority in the South West. The Housing Service provides the highest number of apprenticeships across the Council, with regularly over 20 apprenticeships across all areas including trade operatives.

Community Safety

- 3.37 The Community Safety team (CSP) has developed a Risk Management Panel to tackle the most complex and highest risk issues affecting Swindon residents, who are being supported by agencies across the Borough. The Panel identifies and assesses individual risks and tries to mitigate those risks by co-ordinating a joint response by partners. This intensive case management approach has had considerable success in cases where imminent risk to life is a common theme. Successes include obtaining a Civil Injunction against a domestic abuse perpetrator with multiple victims, who were unable to take action through criminal justice routes due to fear of repercussions.
- 3.38 Swindon has been a statistical outlier nationally with the number of repeat perpetrators identified at MARAC (Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference).

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

Establishing a referral pathway to the Risk Management Panel to focus on tackling perpetrators has seen a significant reduction in repeat perpetrators.

- 3.39 The CSP team in partnership with the police and housing have made good use of Closure Orders and Partial Closures to protect victims of cuckooing by *County Lines* drug dealers. This has enabled support services to work with vulnerable people that would not be accessible without the orders in place.
- 3.40 The CSP team has obtained five civil injunctions against anti-social street drinkers in the town centre. These orders allow for better management of the anti-social behaviour and encourage engagement with substance misuse support services.
- 3.41 Turning Point, our local provider of alcohol and drug treatment, continue to work with partners to reduce the harm caused by substance misuse. They have delivered training to partner agencies and conduct engagement work with high risk and prolific offenders. We have Substance Misuse Liaisons workers based at the hospital who work with individuals who turn up at GWH as a result of their substance misuse as well as Cell Intervention workers who again provide early intervention, in this case where offending behaviour is linked with substance misuse (since April 2018 they have worked with over 175clients). Our drug related deaths are low in comparison to national and regional figures. This is in part due to the successful roll out of Naloxone (we have very good distribution with a wide range of stakeholders) which reverses the effect of overdose from opiates.
- 3.42 Our two year Local Alcohol Action Area project has successfully been completed which has resulted in an upgrade of the licensing database system with an option for mapping licensed premises, training for door staff, Ask for Angela, funding for a gazebo to support NTE night time economy workers and provide a safe space to talk to and help support vulnerable people within the town centre, improving safety (signage developed to guide people through the town centre between Old Town and Regents Circus) and diversity within the night time which will inform the spatial strategy for the Town Centre in the forthcoming Local Plan Review. The Local Plan Review will establish planning policies around the mix and location of land uses in the Town Centre.
- 3.43 We continue to raise awareness of the harms caused by substance misuse and last November actively supported the multi-agency activity around Alcohol Awareness week with a booth in the Pop-up-Café (Brunel shopping centre Swindon), a drop in session at Booth House and a workshop at North Star College engaging with over 114 students as part of their wellbeing week.

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.44 We were successful in our bid for funding to tackle the harm caused to children of alcohol dependent parents. This was a partnership bid that has resulted in over £570k of additional funding coming into Swindon to tackle this issue.

What would you do differently?

Licensing

- 3.45 The Licensing team have to respond to changes in Government guidance and legislation. This has been particularly challenging around establishing a charging regime for kennelling, boarding and canine care operations. Charging guidance was not in place when the legislation was introduced, leaving Councils in the position of not being able to set fees. This gave us a headache around whether we decided to charge, then reset mid-year, or to withhold fee requests until such time as the new charging regime was set whilst allowing operators to trade. We opted for the latter so that we didn't have to recharge or recoup fees. Whilst this was accepted by the vast majority of boarders, it did prove to be complicated a minority. However, the regime is now in place and fees are clear.
- 3.46 I was keen to ensure that Licensing benefitted from early engagement with the digitisation agenda as there is much more that could be done with a fully digital, fit for purpose process. A lot of key staff time continues to be invested in this process to the detriment of day to day service delivery. It is my hope that digitisation will deliver the expected improvements and in doing so should enable a more efficient and effective service delivery.

Public Protection

- 3.47 Similarly, there are ongoing opportunities around digitalisation of some of the public protection services which will increase efficiency and effectiveness. Officers have identified key areas that can be accessed online such as registration of new food business and access to food hygiene information, training, infectious disease information, private water supply information, allergen information, Health & Safety information, Feed, Animal Health, Approval information and report complaints. The next phase of the digitisation journey is to ensure that information is available to enable on line access and that devices are fit for purpose to assist staff in their day to day work.

Housing

- 3.48 The Housing Service is delivering a Service Improvement Plan during 2019/20. Some of the improvements are already making a positive impact such as the improvements to the Voids Service, rent collection rates and on-line repairs reporting. Additional work is underway to improve the technology available for all mobile working. Handheld devices that enable live interaction with the main

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

Housing operating system will reduce unnecessary inter team hand overs, paper forms and add pace to service deliver. All of this will improve customer satisfaction with the Housing Service.

Community Safety

- 3.49 The work of the CSP team on the Risk Management Panels has highlighted the complexity and risk involved in the lives of a number of Swindon residents. These are cases where early intervention and prevention options have not been exercised or not been successful. The Risk Management process can only be successful with full engagement from all relevant partners and if the response is a shared commitment to supporting the most vulnerable. This is a resource intensive process but the outcome far outweighs the investment. The CSP team will continue to work with partners to develop and maintain that engagement and commitment.
- 3.50 Swindon's Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Strategy, covering the next five years, will look to respond with a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) across partnerships and with communities. By using an early intervention approach we can reduce the impact of domestic abuse and prevent escalation, which will increase safety and wellbeing and break the cycle of those affected. Alongside this, working with perpetrators to address and disrupt their abusive behaviours and hold them accountable for their actions, we can reduce crisis intervention.

Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- 3.51 To facilitate an increased focus on preventing drug and alcohol misuse and the harm caused by it we have:
- 3.51.1 Introduced a new multi-agency Harm Reduction quarterly meeting to plan, coordinate and evaluate work on this agenda targeting vulnerable groups. Chaired by Public Health Team with membership from Wiltshire Police, AWP, Swindon Mind, Salvation Army, local pharmacies, Turning Point and other key SBC colleagues.
 - 3.51.2 Introduced a range of digital campaigns, using the successful Turning Point e-platform. These have included Sober for October, Stoptober and Alcohol Awareness week.
 - 3.51.3 Turning Point have run alcohol awareness training for local pharmacies promoted through the LPC. This has trained pharmacy staff to engage service users in health promoting conversations re substance misuse using scratch cards to facilitate.
- 3.52 In order to engage those with Dual Diagnosis we are:

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Michael Ash, Head of Housing, Communities and Housing, mash@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.52.1 Refreshing our local strategy for this vulnerable group. We are investigating running a Dual Diagnosis steering group with Wiltshire Council, with whom we co-commission the substance misuse service.
- 3.52.2 Turning Point and AWP are jointly running a Dual Diagnosis operational forum to skill and information share. They are also discussing complex cases to ensure integrated working.
- 3.53 In order to reduce hospital related admissions for alcohol we have commissioned two specialist substance misuse workers based at GWH from Avon & Wilts Partnership (AWP). They have an in reach role at the hospital offering consultancy, assessment, review and onward links to community services (particularly the community drug and alcohol service). They prioritise trying to intervene with patients who repeatedly present at GWH with alcohol related issues/ 'Frequent Flyers'.
- 3.54 The community service is increasingly targeting engaging alcohol users. They have recently developed a community alcohol group that meets outside the main treatment hub. There is some evidence that alcohol users may be less likely to present for treatment in an environment where illicit drug users are also accessing treatment.
- 3.55 From a low base the numbers of alcohol clients in treatment is increasing and the main source of referrals into the service is now from the alcohol using cohort. The numbers of alcohol using service users successfully exiting treatment is also improving. Both community and residential detox interventions are available to this group.
- 3.56 Public Health England recently noted a 57% increase in numbers of alcohol only clients in treatment from April 2018 to March 2019 which places Swindon well within the top 10% in the country and completely counters the general trend of declining numbers. They further noted that with high levels of Ministerial scrutiny around alcohol this is very good news indeed.
- 3.57 We have commissioned Club Soda – a national organisation who advocate mindful drinking to deliver local events in Swindon. Also Dear Albert – who deliver local peer led events in the town. We are using the Turning Point e-platform to engage service users. This is now the main referral point for alcohol users into the service.

What are the Challenges and Priorities facing your Portfolio?

Public Protection

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

- 3.58 Given current and future budgetary pressures prioritisation of service provision will need to continue to focus on its statutory responsibilities and those areas which are most able to deliver the needs of our community as recognised through the Councils vision and priorities and in particular by protecting those who are most vulnerable or at risk.
- 3.59 Staffing levels in the teams remain tight, and posts are still being filled in the restructure. We now have a fully operational senior team within Public Protection, though some of these officers are new to that level of work. Their development will be essential in meeting our statutory functions and delivering service improvement going forward.

Licensing

- 3.60 The licensing service continues to deal with a wide range of important and high profile issues. Much time has been invested in a programme to renew the main IT support system for licensing, including taxis and this work will continue as part of the Directorate Service Improvement Plan. Currently we only have one fully qualified permanent Licensing officer (the Licensing Manager), whose time inevitably is diverted to other more strategic matters. Whilst a temporary solution is in place I would have liked the ongoing restructure to have been further advanced to provide the Licensing Manager with the professional support she needs, and to ensure that the team is working in the most effective manner possible.
- 3.61 Particular challenges remain around our taxi fleet, which will be addressed in the next year. The Government is currently considering guidance around the possibility of the mandatory introduction of CCTV into licenced taxi cabs, which would provide additional protection and security to both drivers and users. Assuming this guidance mandates the use of CCTV, the Licensing Committee will be asked, at the earliest opportunity, to use it as a guide to the introduction of a local policy or protocol covering the potential use of mandatory CCTV in cabs. Another important issue to be tackled in the next year is that of the age of our fleet linked to the air quality agenda and the need to reduce our carbon footprint. A report will be taken to the Licensing Committee seeking to introduce a new policy around the replacement of older, more polluting vehicles with more energy efficient models at renewal.

Housing

- 3.62 **Housing Repairs.** The social housing 4 year rent reduction of 1% per year has exacerbated the capital funding shortfall in the HRA. As reported in the Medium Term Financial Plan to Cabinet in July 2019 a balanced budget can be achieved over the next 5 years, however, the total funding available to invest in the stock to

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

achieve “just in time” major repairs and renewals is £112.8m with a shortfall of £81.4m.

- 3.63 **Homelessness** is the other key area where although budget pressures have eased thanks to our success with performance related grant awards, this still remains a challenge for future years. In particular, the success rate of winning Rough Sleeper Grant Initiative funding needs to be maintained to continue the good work seen in reducing the number of rough sleepers down from 45 in November 2017 to 24 in September 2019.
- 3.64 **Housing Voids.** A 2 to 7 year contract has been let for vacant property repairs to compliment the in-house team. Poor performance by either the contractors or in-house services will be closely managed by the Head of Housing and the lessons learned from the previous contract will continue to be shared and embedded to improve performance.

Community Safety

- 3.65 The issue of *County Lines* continues to be an area of focus across the agencies given the drastic impact it can have on young people and vulnerable adults. The development of local lines and linked violent crime is a developing concern. Sharing of intelligence and increased awareness raising are both key to working towards tackling County Lines. Focus must lie in reducing the impact of County Lines on the availability of drugs and the exploitation of vulnerable and young people.
- 3.66 Domestic Abuse is still a key area of focus for the CSP team. We can predict in a population of 221,996 (estimate June 2019) that approximately 13,000 people (aged 16 to 59 years) experience domestic abuse (DA) each year (5.9%) in Swindon; and that one person can experience multiple incidents of DA. Police recording for Swindon indicates 4,920 incidents of DA in the Borough have been reported in 2018/19. 2,542 of the reports were considered a crime. Research shows that on average only 20% of incidents are reported to the Police which indicates that there were approximately 19,500 unreported incidents in 2018/19. 433 high risk cases were referred by professionals to the Swindon MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) in 2018/19. In those cases, there were 702 children living within the family.

Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- 3.67 Implementation of the Innovation project to reduce the harm to children of alcohol misuse parents is now underway. This multi strand project is now operational with a monthly steering group chaired by senior management in Children's Early Help Service. The service is based around an operational hub based in SBC Early Help delivering family based interventions. This is supported by additional

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

service provision targeting alcohol misusing parents (Turning point), early interventions with emerging mental health and alcohol issues (TAMHS/Step), alcohol and parental conflict/domestic violence (LIFT Psychology), Peer Mentoring service and awareness campaign (ADFAM) and ACEs awareness training (KCA Training). A quarterly performance report is submitted to Public Health England and a full evaluation of this pilot programme is planned in partnership with the Tavistock Institute.

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.

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.

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th November 2019

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The author has consulted appropriate 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 None.