

Leader of the Council: Six Month Update

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 9th December 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 outline how the Authority has performed in the first half of 2019/20 Municipal Year, towards the Council's priorities and targets.
- 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 work towards the priorities set for 2019/20;
- 2.2 Put relevant questions to the Leader of the Council;
- 2.3 Decide if any changes to the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes are required as a result of the progress report; and
- 2.4 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

What We Have Done Well

- 3.1 First and foremost I would like to thank my Cabinet colleagues: Councillors Oliver Donachie, Brian Ford, Dale Heenan, Russell Holland, Mary Martin, Cathy Martyn, Maureen Penny, Gary Sumner and Keith Williams, for all their efforts on behalf of the people of Swindon. I would also like to thank the Chief Executive on behalf of all the Council's officers who are working so hard to implement policies and deliver quality services within a challenging budget.
- 3.2 A particular thanks also to our award winning Communications Team whose campaign this year was shortlisted for yet another award by the Comms2Point0 judging panel, in the 'Best Internal Comms' category. The campaign helped achieve a 28% increase in staff appraisal completions. Well done to them and to the staff who completed their appraisals.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Caroline Ramsey, (01793) 463420, CRamsey@swindon.gov.uk

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3.3 Economy and Place

- 3.3.1 Economic growth offers prosperity to every place, with well-targeted and planned investment in infrastructure, training and housing that leads to jobs and a supply of affordable homes. In delivering its Vision for Swindon, the Council aims to create sustainable growth and employment within a robust yet dynamic economy, which produces a high quality of life for all. The themes of connectivity, productivity, and quality of life drive this work in partnership with the private, public and community/voluntary sectors, underpinned by the place making which will support a world-class economy.

I was delighted to hear that Swindon is one of the best places in the UK for economic growth, according to a new report from the Good Growth for Cities Index published by professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and think tank Demos.

The town is ranked eighth out of 42 urban centres and along with Bristol (ranked fourth), Swindon is one of only two communities to find a place in the top 10.

- 3.3.2 Swindon's ranking as a top town for Economic Growth, will ensure that we can continue to maximising opportunities to bring in investment through external funding mechanisms. The town's reputation for good transport links, property owner occupation and income distribution, which were above the national average, are attractive draws for businesses and residents alike.

Swindon also saw an index increase for skills in people aged older than 25 which is a positive demonstration of the value to employers: both of employing older workers and of investing in their skills. As we deal with an ageing population and a shrinking supply of young entrants to the labour market due to falling fertility rates since the 1960s, it will become increasingly important that our workplaces seize the opportunities, skills and experience of the older worker.

- 3.3.3 Heritage Action Zone. SBC Planning team submitted a bid to Historic England for a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) status for the Railway Village. The bid was successful and only the second HAZ in the South West. Historic England will work with us over the next five years to revitalise this treasured area of Swindon. Historic England will provide £1.6million of funding, plus we will be able to access their heritage expertise and regeneration skills.

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Through the HAZ Delivery, we will aim to deliver enhancements to key community buildings and spaces such as the Cricketer's, the Health Hydro and the GWR Park. We will also prepare a plan to identify a new use for the Mechanic's Institute and source funding for its refurbishment, improve public spaces, footpaths and signage and address traffic issues in order to improve connectivity with the rest of Swindon.

A key part of the project will be to Increase our understanding of Swindon's railway history through research and by refreshing existing planning policies and listing designation. By carrying out a branding exercise to agree a name for this area which can be used on signage and marketing materials, we will be better able to promote the area to local people and to visitors through exhibitions, tours and other cultural events.

It is my hope that we can support local community groups to help us manage Swindon's heritage assets, delivering positive outcomes for local residents, generating tourism and encouraging private investment into the wider town centre by providing evidence of the Council and Historic England's investment in Swindon and by generating a more positive image of our town. We should also be able to leverage HE's funding to apply for further grants from other organisations.

- 3.3.4 Broadband: Swindon delivered its pledge to have at least 95% of its population with access to the Government's standard of superfast broadband. By the end of 2019, coverage will be 99.6%. Residents have benefited from further investment from private companies stimulated by the Council's actions.
- 3.3.5 Tourism has been boosted with the help of a new website <http://www.visitswindon.org.uk/> that has been created to promote Swindon both as a visitor destination in its own right, as well as a place to stay to explore nearby counties. The Council is encouraging local hotels and businesses to take up reciprocal hosting to promote this website as well as themselves. Switch On To Swindon Ambassadors are being encouraged to create online blogs outlining some of the great places to stay, eat and visit in Swindon. Members of Swindon Library Service and the Business & Economy team are working with other partners to promote the site outside Swindon.
- 3.3.6 The Council has worked successfully with Swindon College, employers and other stakeholders to progress the bid for an Institute of Technology (IoT) in the town. The bid was one of 16 bids nationally that was successful in at Phase One.

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This is a tangible demonstration of excellent partnership working with other LEP areas, employers and education providers to produce a cohesive proposal which will greatly benefit Swindon learners and business. Once again, our town will become a beacon for higher level technical skills training and development thanks to a real partnership of businesses with education providers.

- 3.3.7 Other Partnerships: We continue to use our membership of England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum to support further physical transport infrastructure that is necessary to enhance Swindon's connections to the economies of Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge, and beyond. The particular challenge for Swindon is to ensure that this body, and the National Infrastructure Commission, considers investment in infrastructure that will benefit the western part of Oxfordshire and Swindon, especially improvements to the A420. Being a successful partner here will increase Swindon's presence nationally and support dialogue with government that will benefit the people of Swindon through successful strategic growth in and around the borough.
- 3.3.8 The Western Powerhouse was launched on 1st November and aims to supercharge infrastructure, investment, internationalisation and inclusive growth in an area extending from Swindon in the East, through Bath and Bristol and on to South Wales. We already have fantastic connectivity but we can enhance this by working more closely with our neighbours in the region so that we make the most of any opportunities to improve our infrastructure and attract investment in the future.
- 3.3.9 It is essential to continue to keep transport around the borough flowing effectively. With this in mind, the Council is taking enforcement action against those who unlawfully use bus gates and bus lanes by increasing the number of locations where there are cameras. This has led to a rise in enforcement income that the Council will reinvest into the borough's future highway and transport schemes.
- 3.3.10 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.

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The Council is awaiting details of external grant funding for 2020/21 for all future projects and prevention work.

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.

3.4 Development

- 3.4.1 The Local Plan Review: Public consultation on the preferred and 'emerging' options for the Local Plan was undertaken between 29th July 2019 and 23rd September 2019.
- 3.4.2 The Swindon Housing Company: Construction has commenced on the development for 14 adaptable bungalows at Pilgrim Close. Construction has also commenced on the development at Sparcells Drive for 6 family homes and a scheme for the re-development of Stratton Education Centre has been finalised. Cabinet has recently given approval for the development of 7 more sites for housing purposes.
- 3.4.3 Wichelstowe: The first parcels of land have been transferred to the Wichelstowe LLP. House building is underway and the first reservations have been secured. The district centre infrastructure works are complete and include a new road, canal and footbridge. The Secondary school opened to its first intake of pupils and a full programme of sports/community groups are now using the extended facilities. The construction of the Primary school is underway.
- 3.4.4 Architecture and Construction Management have completed the following work in the last 6 months in addition to the three new schools:
 - Bridlewood Primary School - Provision of Nursery accommodation
 - Chiseldon Primary School – Refurbishment of pupil toilets in the main building
 - Colebrook Junior School – Replacement of external cladding to the main building
 - Lainesmead Primary School – Works to the main building: Replacement boilers, Replacement roof, Replacement of internal doors
 - Lawn Primary School – Concrete structural repair works to the main building

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- Phase 1 of the new William Morris Primary School to enable occupation for the September 2019 term.⁷
- Queens Drive Regeneration – Demolition of George Gay Gardens, Planning approval
- New extension at Plas Pencelli including refurbishment of kitchen/store.

3.4.5 Carriage Works: Work continues apace at the Carriage Works, with Phase II already underway following the success of Workshed which is now nearly fully let. The Cultural Heritage Institute, a venture between University of Wales St David and Royal Agricultural University, began delivering courses at the start of the 2019 academic year and will move in to their new home in spring 2020 delivering Higher Education courses right in the heart of our town centre.

3.4.6 Kimmerfields: In February, Zurich are due to start on site on their new, multi million pound flagship office at Kimmerfields. Enabling work has already begun with the Council relocating an old substation as part of site clearance. The building will take 2 years to complete and staff will move in in summer 2022.

We are also exploring with our joint landowners Homes England how we might deliver upfront infrastructure to open up further land at Kimmerfields for office and residential development.

3.4.7 Bus Boulevard: A critical part of creating a high quality setting for Kimmerfields, the Bus Boulevard, which was shortlisted in the second round of the Future High Streets Fund, continues to develop. Work is underway to deliver the business case for funding for submission at the end of April 2020 with announcements on successful bidders expected in autumn 2020. In the meantime, we are continuing to carry out detailed design and enabling works which will allow us to start on site shortly after any announcement.

3.4.8 Aspen House: We have recently exchanged contracts with Premier Inn on the land at Aspen House for a new £17 million, 197 bed hotel and bar and Block restaurant at the southern end of Regent Street. Designs have been shared with a Design Review Panel as part of the planning process and an application is expected soon. Funding is in place and Premier Inn are keen to start work on the 18 month build as soon as possible.

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3.4.9 Cultural Quarter: A new Advisory Group has been convened to help shape and inform the plans being developed for a new Cultural Quarter at Princes Street and Theatre Square. The work that is to be undertaken will look at the opportunity for the Cultural Quarter to bring together a new theatre or entertainment venue, the Museum and Art Gallery and some civic functions. We will shortly be appointing consultants to develop the business case for the scheme which will look at the likely economic impact, cost and form of the new facilities. It will also continue with more community engagement to ensure we fully appreciate people's wants, needs and aspirations for such a scheme, which would perfectly compliment other regeneration activity aiming to bring in more workers and residents to our town centre and strengthen our high street.

3.5 Adult Services

3.5.1 The annual adult social care client survey gives us the opportunity to assess client satisfaction levels from those people who have received social care services from us during the year. It enables us to assess our own performance and compare it to the national and regional results across our comparators. This year the survey was sent to 916 social care clients across the borough and we received a 41.4% response rate.

There are key indicators that fall out of the survey which measure satisfaction levels across different areas of a person's life, such as their quality of life; feeling safe; how much control they have over their life and how much social contact they have and how easy it is to access timely information and advice.

In the quality of life measure we again improved our performance to 19.5 which remains above the national average of 19.1 and above our regional comparator of 19.3.

People also reported that the control they have over their life has improved from 78.1 to 80.3, which is well above the national average of 77.6 and regional average of 79.6.

People's social wellbeing is improving from 41.1 last year to 47.4 of people who report they have as much social contact as they would like, compared with the national average of 45.9 and regional 46.6.

For Swindon our overall results have shown improvements across all areas of the wellbeing domains from the previous year, and comparatively we are above the England average and mostly above our regional comparator authorities.

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- 3.5.2 Social Work Academy: Adult and Children's Services have been working with colleagues in Learning and Development to develop the professional development opportunities for staff. The 26th November marked the launch of Swindon's first Social Work and Leadership Academy. The Academy is the framework which brings together how we support and develop Social Work as a profession and Swindon including: the reward package; the learning and development offer; Staff support; coaching and mentoring; Research in the sector; The First Swindon Social Work Degree Apprenticeship and Leadership Development within Social Work and Social Care.

The Executive Director of Social Work England, Sarah Blackmore was our key note speaker at the opening, joined by the British Association of Social Work, Community Care, (the lead trade magazine for Social Work Professionals) and our partner Universities who work within our region.

- 3.5.3 Young Adult Admissions: For 2018/19 we again reduced our younger adult admissions to care to 8.1 per 100k population, which fell well below the national average of 13.9 per 100k population and below our regional comparators of 14 per 100k population. As at the end of September 2019, we have achieved 3.66 per 100k population which is well below the target for the month of 5.13. We continue to develop work with parents and families to improve the transition from children to adult services. A very successful Transition Roadshow was held in the summer with more than 70 parents attending.

- 3.5.4 Older Adults: In terms of older adults, again we achieved reduced placement numbers with 2018/19 result reported as 409.4 per 100k population compared with the national average of 580 per 100k population and 513 per 100k population for the regional average. As at the end of September this year, our result is on track at 230.28 per 100k population against the September target of 233.13 per 100k population.

In Swindon the delays attributable to Social Care reduced decreased to an average of 0.9 delayed days during the year down from 4.4 delayed days in 2017-18. The England average was 3.1 days, and regionally the delays were 3.9 delayed days.

Year to date, (Apr-Sept) there were 1.24 bed days lost attributable to social care (bed days per 100,000) against a target of 2.58. Swindon continues to perform well against the South West year to date average of 4.05.

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- 3.5.5 Residential care homes: Whitbourne House, achieved Good rating in the CQC Inspection and a planning application for an extension to Fessey House has been granted, enabling us to provide for older people with dementia and discharge from hospital.
- 3.5.6 Employment: The work we are doing within our employment strategy has supported our ongoing improvements in the numbers of learning disability clients who are in paid employment. We have improved our performance from last year, achieving a 2018/19 result of 6.1% of learning disability clients who are in receipt of services who are also in employment. This is above the national average of 5.9% and the regional average of 6%.
- 3.5.7 Beat the Streets: The 6 week Beat the Streets games finished 6th November 2019. In total we had just under 26 thousand participants who completed over 250 thousand miles over the 6 week period. While fewer people signed up and fewer total miles were completed for this round of the games, the people who signed up achieved greater mileage.

There was a Beat the Street celebration event at Lydiard Park, Coach House area, on Saturday, 16th November. This included a range of have-a-go activities and promoting local activities, linked to getting people into ongoing activity e.g. orienteering (by Wiltshire orienteering club), keeping fit in the wild, craft activities and a range of sports activities.

3.6 Children Services

- 3.6.1 The inspection of children's social care services took place in July 2019. The ILACS inspection is a full inspection of services and took place over a two week period. Ofsted judged children's social care overall effectiveness as Good. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection was also graded as Good. Ofsted judged the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers as requires improvement to be Good.
- 3.6.2 The Ofsted grade for Swindon is very good news and reflects the dedication of leadership, both political and corporate, to improve services for children. Children: Following the OFSTED Inspection, Improvement work continues and Children's Services staff are focussed on the areas identified for improvement. As such, the numbers of children in care are reducing, as are the numbers of children on child protection plans. The number of agency staff working in Swindon remains at a high level. However, there has been some success with agency staff wanting to take up permanent roles and the workforce strategy remains an important focus of improvement work.

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3.7 Air Quality

3.7.1 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. 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.

3.7.2 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.

3.8 Customer Services

3.8.1 We continue to work to improve responsiveness to residents with a new telephony system in Customer Services and three additional staff within the Call Centre. This has improved our ability to answer calls within the agreed service level agreement, although this is still variable depending on demand, and we're doing more work to improve this further and offer greater consistency to our residents. To support residents to use our online offer through the website, we are currently trialling a chatbot free of charge on the website to direct simple resident enquiries and assist in navigation around the web, as part of our ambitions, as laid out in the Customer Access Strategy, and protect our contact centre offer for those that really need it. The success of this will be reviewed in due course.

3.9 Estate Rationalisation

3.9.1 The project is on track to be completed by the end of the financial year, with a reduction in the use of five buildings for office accommodation. This will save the Council £150,000 a year and has also allowed for the consolidation of Children's Social work teams in one location, with three hubs for early help services out in the community. The project has improved the working environment for many of our staff and will also, once completed, provide a new Learning and Development suite to allow for alternative uses for the David Murray John building, a new members room and a quiet zone for colleagues across the Council to use.

3.10 Challenges for the Year Ahead:

3.10.1 Climate: This year I had the honour of being elected Environment spokesman for the Local Government Association Councils and have an important leadership role in creating low carbon and climate-resilient

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communities. Whilst I recognise fully the need to reduce our own carbon emissions, I accept it is equally important to work with our partners and our local communities to tackle the impact of climate change on our local area.

31 per cent of UK greenhouse gas emissions come from residential buildings, surface transport and waste – all areas that the council has some responsibility for.

The Local Plan Review has given us an opportunity to refresh those policies used to determine planning applications in light of revisions to the NPPF, best practice and experience in their operation. Such policies include design, open space provision, affordable housing and infrastructure. One of these policies is existing Policy SD1 with clear links to how the Plan is meeting the climate change challenge.

We may not do as well as our Rural neighbours with environmental protection due to the fact that we are predominantly Urban and have very little land and thus opportunity with which to offset carbon footprint. However, we are committed to expanding the Forest Meadows project with our partner, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This project will see up to £80,000 invested in the three-year programme to enhance meadow and forest sites across 12 sites within the Borough of Swindon covering more than 170 hectares.

We are also working hard to tackle harmful air pollution by devising clean air zones and protecting at-risk areas outside schools, encouraging the use of electric vehicles through promoting recharging points, and investing in cycling. A recent study commissioned from Public Power Solutions, the Council's wholly owned power company, will look at short, medium and long term policy on electric vehicle charging. Over the next year, the Council will continue to examine the potential for supporting domestic and fleet electrical vehicle charging points. This report will present a business case for potential installations on Council owned sites and will also consider where we may be able to influence partners to deploy this facility.

As part of the Local Plan review, the Council will also revisit its planning policies to consider provision of electrical vehicle charging points.

There is much work to be done if we are to mitigate and protect ourselves from the effects of Climate change. I am pleased that my colleagues see the Council's role in leading by example and we will continue to strive to be that exemplar through our vision and commitment to our Climate Change Working Group and its individual steering groups.

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3.10.2 Elections: A surprise General Election to be held on 12th December sees us all waiting to assess the implications for local government as the political parties unveil their General Election manifestos.

At a local level, residents in Swindon will continue to elect their local councillors in 'thirds' following a recent Extraordinary Council meeting at which the threshold vote for driving a change to all-out, four yearly elections was defeated.

3.10.3 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.

3.10.4 Brexit: The precise nature of Brexit is still unknown to us and whilst the debate about Brexit continues, the Council recognises that it must continue to discharge its statutory duties, especially in providing personal care services, as well as delivering the refreshed Vision Priorities and the Swindon Programme. The greatest issue for the Council remains the uncertainty about whether Parliament will approve this Draft Treaty or, if it does not, what could happen next. A future report to Cabinet will set out immediate, medium-term, and long-term possible effects on the Council by comparing a possible worst-case scenario with the draft Treaty. It will focus primarily on those issues as they relate to the local council.

Developing appropriate responses to possible effects of leaving the EU is an absolute priority for this council. We continue to be an active member of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) chaired by the Chief Constable of Wiltshire. This body is already undertaking appropriate preparations with "blue light" services, local authorities, and relevant central government departments and agencies to account for a range of scenarios. The Council's Business Continuity Manager is leading the core LRF task group and senior officers are being kept informed about any pressures as they emerge.

3.10.5 Funding: With the right funding and powers, councils can continue to lead their local areas, improve residents' lives, reduce demand for public services and save money for the taxpayer.

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In my report to Scrutiny last December I referred to the uncertainty surrounding the future funding of local government. That continues to be the case, although the Spending Round announcement in September 2019 did set out a proposal for much welcomed additional funding for Social Care and Special Education.

We anticipate that provisional local finance settlement for 2020/21 will be in the New Year and that the medium term outlook will be established in a spending review later in the year. In the meantime, we are developing our approach to meet the key financial pressures facing the Council, with a particular focus on managing the increasing demands on social care through early intervention and prevention services.

The Council has a strong record of managing its budget and it was good to note the positive external auditor's report to Audit Committee in July. In a challenging year for the sector nationally only around 60% of audits were completed on time. As one of the councils which was within the timescale, that reflects well on the Council's financial management arrangements.

- 3.10.6 Health and Social Care: The new Health and Care Board was approved by Cabinet in October 2019 and is due to start in 2020. The new Board will bring together elected members and CCG Governing Body members to develop our approach to joint commissioning of health and care services in Swindon. The new Board will be an excellent opportunity to continue to strengthen our work with the NHS at a local level.

In relation to Clinical Commissioning Groups, Swindon CCG has voted to merge with Wiltshire and Bath and North east Somerset CCG on 1st April 2020. The Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Health continues to work closely with health colleagues thorough the CCG and the Sustainable Transformation partnership now called the BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) partnership.

- 3.10.7 Obesity: Trends for the last 3 years show a reduction of 5.5% in adult obesity with Swindon going from having a statistically significant greater prevalence of adult obesity to now being similar to England. Whilst in Reception (age 4/5 years) the long term trends are essentially flat, in Year 6, there is a small but discernible long term upward trend in those with obesity or any excess weight. Swindon is nearer the poor performing end when compared to authorities in its benchmarking 'cluster' on all weight measures. Additionally, large inequalities are seen between affluent and deprived areas in Swindon.

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3.10.8 Broadband: Swindon is now part of City Fibre's next round of investment. City Fibre already have around 8 kilometres of fibre in the ground in Swindon delivering services to business. We will continue progressing this investment to deliver services to residents and businesses helping to make Swindon a gigabit city of the future.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution requires the Leader to submit a report immediately after the Council's Annual meeting or at such time as may be agreed by the chair of the Scrutiny Committee and the Leader. The Committee could eschew receiving the half-year update; however, this would weaken the Committee's ability to hold the Administration to account.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

5.1 Financial and Procurement Implications

There are no financial or procurement implications in this report.

5.2 Legal and Human Rights Implications

The 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.

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

Where appropriate, these are addressed in the body of the report.

5.4 Diversity Impact Assessment

Full Diversity Impact Assessments will be undertaken on proposals listed in this report when they are included in Cabinet reports for Members to determine whether to implement them. Hence, no DIA was undertaken at this time.

5.5 Risk Management

None

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6. Consultees

The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer) and Monitoring Officer have not been consulted as this is a Report for Scrutiny and not a decision making report.

7. Background Papers

None.

8. Appendices

There are no Appendices.