

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), John Ballman, Michael Bray, Mark Dempsey, Toby Elliott, Colin Lovell, Mary Martin (Vice-Chair), Cindy Matthews, Kevin Parry, Stan Pajak, Vera Tomlinson and Steve Weisinger.

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, and Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, were in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Maureen Penny and James Robbins.

51. Section 100B(4)(b), Local Government Act 1972

In accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair advised the meeting that he intended that the following additional item should be considered as a matter of urgency for the reasons stated:

To confirm the membership of the Scrutiny Committee's Task Group to review the Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) independent, multi-agency debrief of the Averages' Fire incident and to submit a review report to a public meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

To avoid any unnecessary delay in convening the requisite meeting(s) of the Task Group once the LRF report becomes available.

52. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

53. Public Question Time

Mr Richard Symonds, a local resident, asked a question regarding bus services in the Railway Village and the damage he felt was being caused by buses, particularly by buses mounting kerbs. Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, responded to Mr Symonds' question.

The Director of Law and Democratic Services responded to a question put by Mr Symonds regarding the scheduling of committee meetings. The Director of Law and Democratic Services and Councillor Faramarzi, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to a question put by Mr Symonds to the 12 January meeting of the Scrutiny Committee regarding dog fouling prosecutions.

54.

Minutes

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

(2) That, further to her question at the meeting, regarding the recruitment of social workers, Councillor Cindy Matthews be advised of the number of agency social workers and agency social work managers within the service.

55.

Averies' Fire Task Group - Membership

The Committee was invited to confirm the membership of its Task Group to review the Local Resilience Forum's independent, multi-agency report on the Averies' Fire incident. It was noted that the report was expected to be finalised shortly.

Resolved – That the following members and deputies be appointed to the Committee's Task Group to review the Local Resilience Forum's independent, multi-agency debrief of the Averies' Fire incident and to submit a review report to a public meeting of the Scrutiny Committee:

Councillors Dempsey, Elliott, Penny, Weisinger and Wright (Deputies: Councillors Matthews and Tomlinson).

56.

Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 4th February 2015.

59. *Motion at Council - Use of Police Community Support Officers in Supporting Council Parking Enforcement (Minute for Council to Note)*

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Toby Elliott regarding the apparent reticence of the Wiltshire Police to use Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to support car parking enforcement and how this issue might be pursued further with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Resolved - That Minute 59 of the Cabinet be noted and that, further to resolution (4), this Committee's support of any request to the Wiltshire and Swindon Police and Crime Commissioner to facilitate the use of PCSOs to support car parking enforcement be recorded.

60. *Consultation on Proposals for a Combined Fire and Rescue Service*

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions put by Councillor Toby Elliott and the Chair regarding the viability of the proposals for a combined service and the "backup position" in the event that the proposals prove to be unsustainable.

Resolved - That Minute 60 of the Cabinet be noted.

61. *Budget 2015/16 and Beyond (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillors Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, and Councillor Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Cindy Matthews and Stan Pajak on the following issues:

- The medium term financial strategy and the projected year-on-year funding gap.
- The Council's proposed response to addressing the projected funding gap.
- Management of the increasing demand for adult social care services.
- The delivery of savings and the likely impact on the delivery of Surestart and library services.
- The predicted grant funding reduction.
- The transfer of clients in receipt of Independent Living Allowance to the Council's responsibility and the future funding of that support.
- The Council's minimum reserves level and the feasibility of utilising reserves to respond to particular and budget pressures.

Resolved - That Minute 61 of the Cabinet be noted.

62. *Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2017/18 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, and Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Toby Elliott, Stan Pajak and Mark Dempsey on the following issues:

- The Superfast Broadband Extension opportunity.
- Capital expenditure at the County Ground and the provision of an additional (running) lane to bring the track up to a standard for larger scale meets.
- The availability of Section 106 monies for investment in the County Ground and the provision of new changing rooms and toilet block facilities.
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the status and funding position of the infrastructure projects identified in paragraph 3.23 of the Cabinet report.
- The safety implications for travel between the Central Area and Rodbourne Cheney of any delay in implementing "all vehicle" bridge to open up Kingsdown and the exploration of alternative funding options.
- The level of unspent Section 06 receipts in respect of the Northern Sector development and Haydon III.

Resolved - That Minute 62 of the Cabinet be noted.

63. *Treasury Strategy Statement 2015/16 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, and Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Mary Martin, Cindy Matthews and Toby Elliott on the following matters:

- Portfolio position forecasts and the Council's gross borrowing levels.
- The assessed level of risk in relation to borrowing to fund the capital programmes.

- Issues around the repayment of capital monies borrowed to fund new schools provision.
- The risk to the Council of any increase in borrowing interest rates.

Resolved - That Minute 63 of the Cabinet be noted.

64. *Housing Revenue Account - Rents and Charges 2015/16 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Cindy Matthews Vera Tomlinson on the following matters:

- The outcome of the consultation with tenants groups and the Housing Advisory Forum and other stakeholders and the communication to consultees of the Cabinet decision.
- The reasons for the reduced service charge at Williams Robins Court.
- The proposed Housing Revenue Account Capital Budget and 3 year Capital Programme and the reasons for the projected reduction in respect of expenditure on kitchens and bathrooms.

Resolved - That Minute 64 of the Cabinet be noted.

65. *Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, responded to a question put by Councillor Stan Pajak regarding her signing the Zero Tolerance of Child Exploitation in Swindon pledge on behalf of the Council and the invitation for other members of the Council to do similarly.

Resolved - That Minute 65 of the Cabinet be noted.

66. *Swindon Pay Policy Statement (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Mark Dempsey on the following issues:

- The number of Council employees who receive remuneration below the nationally identified living wage and the cost to the council of paying the living wage to those employees.
- The Council's pay scales.

Resolved - That Minute 66 of the Cabinet be noted.

67. *Sussex Square and the Affordable Development Programme*

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Mark Dempsey on the Affordable Rent Housing Policy and the application of the policy to the proposed rents of properties in the Sussex Square development.

Resolved - That Minute 67 of the Cabinet be noted.

68. *Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor Emma Famarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to questions put by the Chair regarding the new provisions and the limitations these might place on the ability of the Police to deal with instances of anti-social behaviour in the most immediate and effective manner.

Resolved - That Minute 68 of the Cabinet be noted.

It was agreed that information requested by individual members during the course of the Committee's consideration of the Cabinet decisions should be forwarded to the Committee Clerk for distribution to Scrutiny Committee members.

57. Budget Scrutiny 2015-16

The Committee received a report of the Board Director Resources, providing members with the opportunity to better understand the financial context of the organisation and the process the Council has adopted to ensure it has a balanced budget for 2015-16 and a sustainable financial position moving forward. The Committee was also invited to consider the respective roles of the Scrutiny Committee and the Resources Overview Committee in relation to the Council's budget setting process, particularly with regard to on-going austerity and the potential advantages of a more cross-party approach to budget setting.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that the Corporate Governance Working Group be asked to review the respective roles of the Scrutiny Committee and the Resources Overview Committee in relation to the Council's budget scrutiny function, with a view to enhancing the role of the Resources Overview Committee so that it might be involved earlier in the overall budget setting process and better able to influence resource allocation in relation to specific projects.

58. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Councillor Emma Famarzi, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, was in attendance and presented a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within her portfolio of responsibility:

- Allocations and Advice Services
- Empty Homes
- Estate and Tenancy Management
- Housing Enabling and Strategic Services
- Homeline Services
- Homelessness
- Housing Right to Buy/Sales Services
- Neighbourhood Wardens
- Private Sector Housing Renovation Grants
- Repair and Improvements to Council Housing Stock
- Sheltered Accommodation
- Police Authority/Police and Crime Commissioner liaison
- Community Safety Partnership
- Environmental and Public Protection Services
- Gypsies, Travellers and Unauthorised Encampments

- Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Reducing Domestic Violence
- Control Room Operations

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Faramarzi, in her presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within her portfolio that she felt had been most successful, those where a different approach might have produced better results and the lessons that might have been learned as a consequence, and the challenges she expected to be faced by the Council relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond, particularly in relation to on-going budgetary constraints.

Following her presentation of the report, Councillor Faramarzi, supported by her team of officers, responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following matters:

- The increasing availability of illicit tobacco and alcohol products and the cost to the Council of investigating allegations of such sales, particularly in cases where illegality is not subsequently established.
- The Council's policy in respect of the offer of flexible tenancies and the circumstances where such introductory tenancy would not eventually lead to an offer of a secure tenancy.
- The Housing Waiting List and the Council's response to meeting the particular demand for 1 and 2 bedroom properties.
- The Council's statutory compliance activity and the action that can be taken to overcome problems encountered in gaining access to some properties in order to carry out requisite gas safety checks.
- Empty Homes and options available to the Council to bring such properties back into use.
- Homelessness and the suggestion in the report that the number of prevention cases has reduced, mainly due to a buoyant rental market and rental values increasing above the Local Housing Allowance.
- The point of contact (24/7) at the Council for individuals facing homelessness and the ways in which Councillors can best assist when contacted about specific homelessness cases.
- The Council's housing allocations policy and the reasons for the apparent reduction in the number of applicants on the housing waiting list (Appendix 2 to the report).
- The feasibility of advising applicants for housing transfers of potential implications for school placements (where a move is sought into a new catchment area).
- The suitability of information provided by the Police in relation to licensing applications.
- Councils' counter-terrorism responsibilities under the new statutory "Prevent" duty forming part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Bill currently before Parliament.
- The "Safe and Warm" scheme and the reasons for the apparently low take up of insulation measures following assessment.
 - the percentage of homes identified as meeting the scheme requirements but where the occupiers refuse the Council access to carry out the insulation works.

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

(2) That information requested by individual members during the course of the Committee's consideration of the Cabinet member's report and presentation should be forwarded to the Committee Clerk for distribution to Scrutiny Committee members.