

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 22 JUNE 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), John Ballman, Oliver Donachie, Richard Hurley, Gemma McCracken, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, Maureen Penny, Stan Pajak, Carol Shelley, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Chris Watts and Timothy Swinyard

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 Adult Health and Social Care, Toby Elliott, Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning, Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, and Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, were in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Colin Lovell and Vera Tomlinson and from Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.

1. Declarations of Interest

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

Councillor Oliver Donachie made a personal and non-prejudicial interest in respect of agenda items that might concern Public Power Solutions, in his capacity as a non-Executive Director of that organisation.

2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

3. Minutes

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th April 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

(2) That, with reference to Minute 70(2), it be noted that Councillor Des Moffatt had been appointed as Councillor Mark Dempsey's replacement on the Committee's Task Group established to review the Local Resilience Forum's report on the Averies fire incident.

4. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 17 June 2015.

5. *Wichelstowe Joint Venture*

Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care, responded to a question put by the Chair regarding the programme for the development of the social housing elements of the joint venture scheme.

Resolved – That Minute 5 of the Cabinet be noted.

6. *Budget Management 2014/15*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, responded to a question put by the Chair on the opportunities for opposition members to influence the budget setting process.

Resolved – That Minute 6 of the Cabinet be noted.

7. *Capital Programme Monitoring Outturn and Treasury Performance 2014/15*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Des Moffatt regarding the analysis of the Council's debt and investment position, set out in the Cabinet report, and, in particular, the increase to the net borrowing position.

Resolved – That Minute 7 of the Cabinet be noted.

8. *SEQOL – Proposed Contract Amendments*

Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Des Moffatt and Stan Pajak on the following matters:

- The amendment to the Council's contract with SEQOL and the potential for additional costs being borne by the Council as a result of the proposed transfer of services.
- The number of staff to be transferred under the proposed contract change and the effect of those transfers on the Pension Fund.

Resolved – That Minute 8 of the Cabinet be noted.

9. *Business Model for Solar Investment*

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions and observations put by the Chair and Councillor Des Moffatt, Toby Elliott, Maureen Penny, Chris Watts and Oliver Donachie on the following issues:

- The investment model, the level of investment contribution and the opportunity for community investment in the solar power projects (including the opportunity for investment by members of the Council).
- The potential for extending the A419 sound barrier (East) to increase the viability of that location for a solar power production facility.
- Provision within the terms and conditions of the associated Local Development Order for the eventual reinstatement of PV array sites.

- The proposed investment model and the security of community investment in the project.
- The ability of the proposed investment model to respond to, and to effectively compete in, a changing energy retail market.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 9 of the Cabinet be noted.
(2) That members' acknowledgement of the high quality of the recent Public Power Services (PPS) presentation on solar power opportunities be recorded.

10. The Allocation of Bus Services Operators' Grant

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair on the Council's Concessionary Travel scheme and the use and allocation of travel mobility vouchers.

Resolved – That Minute 10 of the Cabinet be noted.

11. Swindon Local Transport Plan Implementation Plan 2015/16

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Des Moffatt on the following matters:

- The budget for the Local Transport Plan and the case to be made for Government funding of the "Thamesdown Drive Extension".
- The allocation of the available funding for resurfacing and repair works.
- The ability for Ward Councillors to feed into the process for the prioritising of road improvement schemes.

Resolved – That Minute 11 of the Cabinet be noted.

5. Leader of the Council: Annual Report

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, attended this first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the Municipal Year 2015/16 to report to the Committee on (a) the Council's performance in 2014/15, particularly in relation to its achievements in delivering against the Administration's specific priorities and targets, and (b) challenges for 2015/16 and beyond.

Councillor Renard introduced his report, commenting on some of the highlights for the last year, including:

- Swindon's continuing successful local economy and, in particular, its increased employment levels.
- The continuing public sector confidence in Swindon, as exemplified by the private investment in schemes such as the extension to the outlet village, the Regent Circus development, Dorcan and others.
- The success of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in securing £94m in growth deals, the highest allocation per head of population nationally.
- The opening of the new University Technical College in September 2014 and the opportunities this represents for young people in Swindon.

- The establishment of two new free schools in the secondary sector.
- The Council's excellent School Place Planning strategy, one of most successful nationally in offering first place, or one of top three, preferences.
- The significant progress in Road Network investment.
- Regeneration as a key priority and the future development of a new Speedway Stadium as well as additional homes.
- The success of the Moirai refurbishment of the Oasis Leisure Centre and its establishment as a regional, perhaps national, leisure destination.
- The on-going successful regeneration of Sussex Square, this following on from a significant number of neighbourhood centre regeneration schemes in recent years.
- The significant achievement of the Council in securing approval of its Local Plan, becoming one of the first major councils in the country to do so.
- The enhancement of the Radnor Street Cemetery, allowing it to be a centre for the Great War commemorative events.
- The Council's support of successful neighbourhood local "clean up" days
- The positive impact of the relocation of the Swindon Police Point to the civic campus
- The Council's successful bid for its first significant new council housing programme in 25 years and the commencement of work on a programme of 100 new affordable homes, attracting £2.5m in grant from the Homes and Communities Agency with the Housing Revenue Account investing a further £16.5 m.
- The secured future of Swindon's leisure facilities through their transfer to GLL and Twigmarket, eliminating the previous revenue subsidy and associated maintenance overheads.
- The fifth consecutive Council Tax freeze and the associated benefit for Swindon residents at a time when household budgets remain under pressure.
- The opening of the Swindon Advice and Support Centre in Sanford Street to bring together different voluntary and community support groups in a single, accessible, town centre location.
- The implementation of the Get Active strategy in furtherance of the key strategy of finding ways to support people living independent lives and thereby relieving pressure on health and social welfare budgets in future.
- The commendable, and on-going, work, under the auspices of the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, to assist people facing financial hardship.

Following his presentation of the report, members were given the opportunity to put questions to the Leader of the Council. Issues raised by members included:

- Work to be done in conjunction with the Academies and other partners to improve Swindon's Key Stage 4 results.
- Issues associated with the clearance of existing buildings and structures and the creation of development space too far in advance of new development being in a position to proceed on the vacant lots.
- The enhancement of data in the report relating to the number of people claiming job seekers allowance.
- Student intake and retention at the University Technical College.
- The benefit to GLL from cheaper electricity bills, stated in the report, and the recovery by the Council from Moirai of monies owed in respect of utilities.

- The Localities Team's support for neighbourhood "clean up" days.
 - Feedback on the effectiveness of "clean up" days.
 - Clarification of insurance cover issues pertaining to "clean up" days".
- The pressure on local mental health services and the participation of GPs in mental health services initiatives.
- The future of the Mechanics Institute and the Locarno.
- Feedback from the Heritage Lottery Fund on the Council's unsuccessful bid for lottery funding for a new museum and art gallery, proposals for the future provision of a museum and art gallery and the future use of the existing facility in Bath Road.
- The feasibility of reviewing the Council's electoral arrangements, particularly with regard to holding "all out" elections.
- The acceptance of social inclusion and social diversity as central themes for the development and prioritisation of Council strategies.
- The Council's ambition for an over-arching vision for the town and borough and opportunities in the coming year for the regeneration of Swindon civic pride.
- Domestic abuse as a continuing issue in Swindon and comparison with national statistics.
 - The status of the Council's Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy and Action Plan.
 - The potential implications for the strategy of:
 - a purported increase in the incidence of male spousal and "non-traditional" spousal abuse; and
 - accommodation pressures on the Swindon Women's Aid facility.
- The application of the Swindon Special Rate and the support and potential for parishing of the non-parished areas of the borough.
- The Council's commissioning of voluntary services and the role of Voluntary Action Swindon.
- The analysis of the savings associated with the transfer of the Council's leisure facilities.
 - The future of the Milton Road leisure facility.
- Issues relating to the disposal of non-traditional council-owned residential properties.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Renard, the Leader of the Council, be thanked for his informative presentation of his Annual report and for his full and open responses to members' questions on the issues raised.

(2) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services be asked to investigate and clarify the issue of insurance cover on community litter picks and clean up days, particularly whether the council's insurance covers the activity if it is organised by localities officers, and/or attended by a councillor.

6. Work Programme 2015/16

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services on the results of the 2015/16 Overview and Scrutiny work programme consultation exercise and inviting the Committee to agree a rolling work programme for the Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16, taking into account the issues raised in the Leader of the Council's presentation to this meeting and the results of the supporting consultation exercise.

Resolved – (1) That, subject to (2) below, the draft work programme 2014/15, tabled at the meeting, be approved.

(2) That the work programme be amended to include the consideration of a report on the topic of the parishing of the entire borough area. That a suitable date for the consideration of this report be agreed between the Chair and the responsible officer.

(3) That members' suggestion that the work programme include a review of the implications of a decision that the country withdraws from the European Union (EU) be noted. That the Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, be advised of the suggestion, and members' concerns, and advised that the Committee would wish him to provide an update on this topic area as part of his question and answer session with the Scrutiny Committee on 12th October 2015. That, at that meeting, the Committee determines whether it would wish to include in its work programme a review of the impacts of such decision to withdraw from the EU and the measures which the Council can take to mitigate those impacts.

(Councillors Stan Pajak and Chris Watts made personal, non-prejudicial declarations of interest in relation to the Committee's consideration of the possible inclusion in its work programme of issues concerning the outcome of any referendum pertaining to the country's membership of the EU.)