

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), John Ballman, Richard Hurley, Gemma McCracken, Kevin Parry, Oliver Donachie, Colin Lovell, Maureen Penny, Carol Shelley, Chris Watts and Caryl Sydney-Smith.

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, and Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, were in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stan Pajak, Vera Tomlinson and Des Moffatt.

31. Declarations of Interest

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

32. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, a local resident, asked a number of questions regarding the Community Governance Review and, particularly, the proposed methodology for public consultation. Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to Mr. Worman's questions at the meeting.

Mr Jim Boyd, a resident of Old Town, asked questions about the public consultation to be carried out in support of the Community Governance Review and the Council's position in the event of limited or no public engagement in the process. Councillor Renard responded to Mr. Boyd's questions at the meeting.

Mr Boyd asked a further question about the Council's process for the scrutiny of its budget proposals and the accuracy of budget figures. Councillor Renard responded to Mr. Boyd's question at the meeting.

Mr Boyd concluded by asking if a differentiation could be made between "public engagement" and "public consultation" and, specifically, whether two public engagement sessions that had taken place recently regarding the future of Lydiard House and Park were part of, or in addition to, a formal public consultation. Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to the general aspects of Mr Boyd's question, relating to public engagement and public consultation, at the meeting. The Chair, Councillor Bob Wright, asked that the responsible Cabinet Member be asked to provide a written response on the specific issue raised by Mr Boyd in relation to the Lydiard House and Park public engagement sessions.

33. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th October, 2015, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

34. Consideration of Cabinet Panel decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the meeting of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation held on 18th November 2015.

21. Increasing the Age Range at Crowdys Hill Special School from 11-16 to 11-19 from September 2016

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, supported by the Council's Strategic Planning Manager Commissioning Economy and Attainment, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Gemma McCracken and Chris Watts on the following matters:

- The implications of the proposed expansion on future capacity at Swindon Secondary schools.
- The analysis of the success of the proposal by means of measured outcomes.
- Issues concerning Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and the transfer of pupils' personal care budgets between schools.
- Capital investment in educational projects and the arrangements in place to facilitate communication between schools on matters of identified best practice and value for money.
- The implications of the proposed expansion on future SEN provision at Uplands School.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 21 of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation be accepted.

(2) That this Committee recognises and commends the work of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Council's Education Officers in developing this proposal that will extend the further education opportunities for students at the school as part of the Council's own long-term SEN provision development strategy.

35. The Leader of the Council's Half-Year Update

Further to Minute 5, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, attended the meeting to report to the Committee on the Authority's performance in the first half of the 2015/16 Municipal Year in progressing the Council's priorities and targets, as outlined in his Annual presentation to the Committee at its June meeting.

Councillor Renard introduced his report, commenting on the Council's achievements so far in 2015/16 and highlighting the challenges for the remainder of the year.

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:

- The timeframe for development of proposals based on the initial stage of the Community Governance Review and for consultation on those proposals.
- The Wichelstowe joint venture and the income generation information included in the report.
 - The timeframe for the repayment of the debt incurred by the Council in providing the project infrastructure.

- The timeframe for the parties' agreement to the joint venture contractual arrangements and the scheduling of meetings of the associated Cabinet Member Advisory Group.
- The Council's medium-term financial position and the statement in the report that £100m of savings had been delivered in the last five years.
 - The distinction to be made between savings on service provision cost and cuts to service provision.
- The Council's response to the changing fiscal landscape and the contention in the report that some functions currently delivered by the Council might be better provided by other means.
- The level of savings that could be attributed to the Council no longer having to pay revenue subsidies, as a result of transferring service provision, and the level of private sector investment in services as a result of such transfers.
- The Council's annual subsidy of £450k in respect of Lydiard House and Park.
- The student admissions and retention data for the University Technical College and measures that might be taken to promote the facility.
- The implications for the Council of the provision in the Government's Autumn Statement 2015 that local authorities will have the power to increase adult social care funding through a new 2% council tax precept.
- The process for initiating a Community Governance Review and the availability of guidance for Parish Councils on their power to conduct a referendum on any given issue.
- Opportunities for cross-party working to deliver Vision priorities and pledges.
- The Swindon Museum and Art Gallery project and issues relating to the provision of a sustainable future for the Borough's cultural and heritage treasures.
- The dilapidated condition of a number of council-owned buildings and opportunities to avoid future maintenance costs and realise the value of such assets by encouraging community investment in the use, management and upkeep of such buildings.
- Community engagement in the progression of Vision pledges.
- The potential for the devolution of powers and responsibilities under the Combined Authorities proposals.

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

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to members via the Committee Clerk (Appendix 1 refers).

36. Status of requests for action and/or information

The Committee received a report advising on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information.

Resolved – (1) That the report on the status outstanding issues and member requests for information, including the information included in the update tabled at the meeting, be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the guidance document on the topic of insurance cover for community "clean up" days, forwarded to all members of the Council on 11 November, would be updated in accordance with the Committee's suggestion at this meeting, and re-issued.

(3) That, on the topic of outstanding responses to questions put by members, the officers be asked to ascertain if changes to the Council's procurement process, proposed at a meeting of the Full Council, had been implemented.