

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), John Ballman, Richard Hurley, Colin Lovell, Gemma McCracken, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, Stan Pajak, Oliver Donachie, Maureen Penny, Chris Watts, Nick Martin and Derique Montaut

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, and Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Shelley and Vera Tomlinson.

50. 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 Brian Mattock made a personal declaration in respect of Cabinet's consideration of agenda item no. 5 ("SEQOL contract") in that his daughter is a social worker employed by SEQOL.

51. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman asked a number of questions regarding the financing of services in Parished and Non-Parished areas of Swindon. Councillor Russell Holland Cabinet Member for Finance People and Performance, and Board Director Resources responded to Mr. Worman's questions at the meeting.

52. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2016, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

53. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 10th February 2016.

57. SEQOL contract

Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Moffatt Chris Watts Maureen Penny John Ballman and Gemma McCracken on the following matters:

- The pressure that the continuing and growing demand for adult social care places on the effective delivery of other services and the significant savings that have been achieved through the provision of semi-supported housing units.
- The Better Care Fund and the shift in service provision from expenditure on acute services to support for preventative services and independent living.
- The in-house provision of a front-line social workers service.
- Potential redundancy costs associated with the proposal and the financial liabilities that prevented the Council being considered as the service provider.
- The maintaining of the children's emergency duty service and the future shaping of the service
- The reduced public health budget and the joint approach of Public Health and Adult Social Care, including the combination of resources, to facilitate the continued provision of preventative health services and to ensure the wellbeing of local residents.
- The continuing work with SEQOL to reshape remaining services that do not easily fit into the preferred model of an integrated acute and community health service.

Resolved – That Minute 57 of the Cabinet be noted.

58. Securing a Sustainable Future for Swindon's Cultural Assets, Libraries and Community Services

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Derique Montaut Chris Watts and Des Moffatt on the following matters:

- The proposed level of reduction to be achieved in the libraries service budget by 2020.
- The implications of proposed budget reductions for individual library facilities and the arrangements for disseminating that specific information to ward Councillors.
- The outcome of the consultancy report on the library service, that document's informing of the development of the draft Libraries and Community Services strategy and its availability for consideration by members.
- Use of the Central Library and options for a sustainable of a borough-wide library service.
- The shared community usage of library facilities.
- The key library data (in the report to cabinet) and the comparison of cost per unit loaned in relation to the cost of providing the lending service at each

facility.

- The total annual cost in 2014/15 for library services, the level of service savings to be achieved by 2020 and the emerging model for libraries and community-based services.
- The correlation between non-professionally managed library facilities and the effectiveness of the service on offer at those facilities.
- The availability of data on the footfall within library facilities, where such visit is for a secondary, community service provided at the facility.
- The usage data presented in the cabinet report relating to the Walcot library.

Resolved – That Minute 58 of the Cabinet be noted.

59. Budget 2016/17 and Beyond (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, with Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care and Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Des Moffatt, Chris Watts and Stan Pajak on the following matters:

- Savings anticipated as a result of the proposed Parishes change programme and the calculation and application of the Special Expenses Rate as part of the Council tax setting process.
- The Council's commitment to paying all staff at or above the national living wage in 2016/17.
- The 2% Council Tax precept for Adult Social Care (ASC) and the implications for new and enhanced service provision via the precept of the application of the National Living Wage for carers.
- The future funding of bus services and the review of social transport provision.
- Revenue estimates in relation to the enforcement of the public service protection order.
- The potential to use the Government's additional one-off transitional grant funding to
 - carry out essential maintenance to council-owned assets, particularly properties in Theatre Square, to facilitate future community uses.
 - Tackle the ongoing issue of car parking on landscaped areas, including the recovery of some green areas to increase car parking provision.

Resolved – That Minute 59 of the Cabinet be noted.

60. Capital Programme 2016/17 (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance,, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Maureen Penny and Des Moffatt on the following matters:

- The funding required to refurbish and position a mobile classroom at Westrop Primary School.
- The revenue impact of the Children's Services capital spending schemes detailed in paragraph 8 of the report.
- The Cabinet review of the Bruce Street Bridges works and the opportunity for Scrutiny to be involved in that review.

Resolved – That Minute 60 of the Cabinet be noted.

61. Housing Revenue Account - Rents and Charges 2016/17 (Minute for Confirmation)

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to questions put by the Chair on the following matter:

- The investment of Right to Buy income in new build programmes and the feasibility of utilising this income for the purchase of properties for adaptation to social housing.

Resolved – That Minute 61 of the Cabinet be noted.

62. School Place Planning Update 2016

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Des Moffatt and Gemma McCracken on the following matters:

- The future use of the educational facility in Ferndale Road.
- The requirement for new school bids to include nursery care provision and proposed measures to encourage existing schools to introduce such provision.
- The free school option, utilising Government funding, as the Council's preference in moving forward in meeting requirements for additional school places.

Resolved – That Minute 62 of the Cabinet be noted.

63. School Admission Arrangements 2017-18

Resolved – That Minute 63 of the Cabinet be noted.

64. Swindon Pay Policy Statement 2016 (Minute for Confirmation)

Resolved – That Minute 64 of the Cabinet be noted.

65. Measuring the Success of the Vision

Resolved – That Minute 65 of the Cabinet be noted.

66. Superfast Broadband

Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Oliver Donachie Chris Watts Des Moffatt and Stan Pajak on the following matters:

- BT's current position regarding the commercial viability of upgrading areas of North Swindon to broadband speeds.
- The Council's certification of the UKBN solution as fit for purpose and the external experts responsible for the detailed technical assessment of the solution.
- The Cabinet Member's view of the likelihood that the demand in parts of the urban area would be sufficient to require UKBN to install fibre optic cables in order to achieve the required superfast speeds to all households.
- The option of providing a fibre optic distribution that households could choose to pay to have their property connected to.
- The potential negative implications of a significant take up of the UKBN service.
- The contract penalty for non-delivery a 24Mb per second service
- The impact on the optimum technical solution and viability of the UKBN proposal of the recent refusal of planning permission for several telecommunications masts.
- The validity of comments attributed to BT Openreach in the local press regarding a fibre optic solution in North Swindon.
- The validity of the Local MP's views on the most appropriate broadband solution for Swindon.

Resolved – That Minute 66 of the Cabinet be noted.

67. Wichelstowe Joint Venture

Resolved – That Minute 67 of the Cabinet be noted.

68. Community Investment in solar developments on Council land

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Maureen Penny and

Gemma McCracken on the following matters:

- The permeability of the ground beneath solar panels and the concern expressed by some residents of the potential that this might enhance instances of surface water flooding.
- Swindon investors in solar development and the legal position that they could not be afforded priority over other, non-Swindon investors.
- The utilisation of profits from community investment schemes to fund the proposed solar sound barrier scheme.
- The feasibility of the Newburn Crescent site being utilised for a solar development scheme.

Resolved – That Minute 68 of the Cabinet be noted.

69. References from Other Council Bodies - Streetsmart Overview and Scrutiny Committee / Health and Wellbeing Board

Resolved – That Minute 69 of the Cabinet be noted.

70. Devolution - Moving Forward

Resolved – That Minute 70 of the Cabinet be noted.

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

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, the 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 including young offenders and reducing anti-social behaviour
- Environmental and Public Protection Services (including Licensing)
- Gypsies, Travellers and Unauthorised Encampments
- Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- 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 which 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 responded to Members' specific questions and observations on the following topics:

- The role, promotion and work of the Event Safety Advisory Group.
- Charges for work undertaken in respect of food safety through inspection, advice and support.
- The use of the Council's out of hours service in reducing service requests relating to noise nuisance.
- The targeting of areas with reported issues involving "Door Step" crime and the activities of Rogue Traders through the heightening of resident awareness.
- The involvement of Trading Standards Officers in events tackling online and credit card fraud.
- The possible review by Government of Licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- Officer work to improve the conditions of Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- Officer involvement in planning applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- Core issues that led individuals to live in Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- The Council's continued involvement in the Buy with Confidence Scheme.
- Council action against sub-standard landlords.
- The renting of garages as residential accommodation.
- Council action to educate shop owners to prevent the sale of inappropriate or unsafe age restricted products.
- Issues relating to waiting lists for Council properties.
- Bidders understanding of tenancies and their conditions.
- Reasons for offers of housing accommodation being rejected by bidders.
- The turnaround times for bringing void Council properties back into use.

- Staffing changes within the Council's Public Protection Team.
- Legislation to ensure rented housing is safe to occupy and how Council Officers respond to reports of potentially unsafe accommodation.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Emma Faramarzi be thanked for attending the meeting to present her performance report and for her full and open responses to Members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(2) That the information requested by Members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to Members via the Committee Officer.

55. 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 of 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 following a meeting between the Board Director, Children's Services and OFSTED the Council's decision not to include elected Members on the Swindon Fostering Panel had been approved.