

STREETSMART AND HIGHWAYS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Alan Bishop, Paul Dixon, Colin Lovell, Derique Montaut, Kevin Parry (Chair), Eric Shaw (Vice-Chair) and Timothy Swinyard

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Junab Ali, Paul Baker, Nick Martin, Vera Tomlinson, Joe Tray and David Wood.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills and Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart.

19. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

20. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

21. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2015, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

22. Highway Asset Management

The Committee received a report reviewing the Council's current approach to Highway Asset Management and its proposed action plan in response to the Government's recent changes to highway maintenance grant funding linked to the Incentive Fund.

Mr Tim Price (Service Manager, Highway Infrastructure) and Jason Humm (Head of Highways and Transport) explained changes to the grant funding to highway infrastructure through the Government's Incentive Fund which was an evidence based self-assessment through twenty-two questions based upon of the following three bands encapsulating five keys areas:

1. Asset Management Policy;
2. Benchmarking and Efficiency Resilience;
3. Customer Questions and Operation Service Delivery.

Based upon the assessment of the responses to the Incentive Fund Questions, and a Department of Transport Audit, the Council would be placed into one of three bands which would determine the level of Government Grant during the Financial Year. The Council's current strategy had been approved by the Cabinet in October 2015 and aimed to move from band one to three over a two year period.

Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Highways) commented that the difference in potential funding between the top and bottom bands was £1.5 million over a five year period. The action plan attached to the report identified how the Council intended to progress from band three to one over a two year period. Councillor Heenan advised that the cost of actions to improve the Council's progress against assessment criteria needed to be weighed against the financial benefits derived through additional grant received.

Following the presentation of the report Councillor Heenan and the officers responded to members questions and observations on the following issues:

- The role of Councillors within the strategy.
- Engagement of Parish Councils, Ward Councillors and the public as part of the engagement strategy to improve the Incentive Fund banding.
- The future role of Parish Council should there be devolution of highway services.
- The role of the Streetsmart and Highways Overview and Scrutiny Committee in overseeing the proposed improvement strategy.
- Improvements in the reporting process for highway related issues.
- The impact of any future Eastern development on the Council's Highways Strategy, Action Plan and ability to improve its Incentive Fund banding.
- Funding issues for major schemes such as the White Hart Junction.
- The impact of collaboration with Wiltshire Council on the Council's Highway Strategy and Action Plan.

Resolved - (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Committee welcomes Mr Jason Humm, the newly appointed Head of Highways and Transport.

(3) That Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, and his supporting officers be thanked for attending to present the report and for their full open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues.

23.

Libraries Update

The Committee received an oral presentation by Mr Patrick Weir, Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering updating members on the current position regarding Swindon's Libraries including:

- The current position with regard to Swindon's Library Service as detailed in the report to the meeting of the Cabinet on 10th February 2016.
- The financial pressures facing the Council's Library Service and the potential budget reduction from £2.6 million to £1.1 million by 2020.
- The Council's budget commitment to reduce Library funding by £300,000 during the Financial Year 2016/17.
- The changing pattern of service usage within the libraries and the need to assess this.
- The need to reflect on service provision given the Borough's changing demographics.
- The Council's statutory duty in respect of library provision.
- Local engagement in the formulation of proposals for the Council's Library

Service.

- The current engagement process with interested parties in respect of the future of the Council's library service to raise awareness of the challenges facing the Council's Library Service and to receive public feedback.
- The need for public consultation once a strategy on the library service had been produced and considered by the Cabinet in June 2016.

Following the presentation members were given the opportunity to put questions on the issues raised. The Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering responded to members' questions and observations on the following issues:

- The forthcoming consultation process and the current engagement process.
- The public's preference to retain a professional staff to run the library service.
- The current staffing structure of the Council's library service.
- The options available for future service provision should the current projected savings be confirmed.
- The use of locality meetings and Parish Councils to help advertise the engagement process.
- The benefit of having a prepared statement that Locality Chairs could present to future locality meetings.
- The timetable for the decision making process and why the Cabinet was not receiving a report until June 2016.
- The problems facing rural communities if the current library infrastructure was not maintained.
- The future of the Council's mobile library service.

Resolved – (1) That the Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering be thanked for his presentation and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(2) That the Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills and the Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering be requested to attend a special meeting of this Committee to present the report on the future of the Council's Library Service following its consideration by the Cabinet in June 2016.

24. StreetSmart Performance Update

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, the Head of Streetsmart presented a report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the service areas within the Streetsmart portfolio and commented specifically on:

- The Council's Waste Service.
- Improvements to the fleet of vehicles used by the Council's Waste Service.
- Improvements to the Council's Green Waste Service.
- Improvements to the layout and access to the Waterside site.
- Greater community involvement in Town Centre Cleansing.
- Prosecutions of EnviroCrime.
- Grounds Maintenance.
- Devolution of Services to Parish Councils.
- Reduction in Customer Complaints.

At the request of the Chair, Mr Barrett in his presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within the portfolio which he 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 he 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 his presentation of the report, Mr Barrett responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following topics:

- The reasons for the reduction in complaints relating to the provision of streetsmart services.
- The budgetary pressures facing the streetsmart service.
- The proposed further devolution of streetsmart services to Parish Councils.
- Recycling issues.
- Work on filling potholes prior to this service being transferred back to the Highways Department.
- The recent Health and Safety Executive Inspection of Waste Services.
- The impact of the removal of the hours localities could allocate for Streetsmart works at a local level.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Head of Streetsmart be thanked for his presentation and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

25. Review of Devolution of StreetSmart Service Pilots - Task Group Report

Councillor Derique Montaut, on behalf of the Review of Devolution of Streetsmart Service Pilots Task Group presented a report of the Head of Streetsmart on the outcome of the Task Group's Work. It was noted that the Task Group had met with the Chairs and Clerks of Wroughton and Haydon Wick Parish Council's to discuss benefits and drawbacks of the devolution of services. Councillor Montaut advised that the Task Group also considered how well the pilot schemes were operating in terms of quality of the service provided and had reviewed their cost effectiveness to ensure local residents were receiving value for money.

Following Councillor Montaut's introduction, members discussed the report and commented on the following issues:

- The delivery of services under the devolution pilot schemes.
- Value for Money of the pilot schemes and how Parish Councils could operate services for less money than Swindon Borough Council.
- The future reduction of Swindon Borough Council grants for the provision of the devolved services and how this might affect service delivery standards.
- Procurement issues should any contract be large enough to require the European Union Procurement regulations to take effect.
- The need to ensure that lead in times for service devolution were adequate to

- ensure the maintenance of service standards.
- Joint work between Parish Councils and Swindon Borough Council in respect of EnviroCrime.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Head of Streetsmart be thanked for his report and presentation and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(3) That the members of the Review of Devolution of Streetsmart Service Pilots Task Group be thanked for their work in support of the review.

(4) That the Head of Streetsmart be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of this Committee benchmarking the costs of Parish Councils and Swindon Borough Council in providing services that have been devolved under the Streetsmart devolution scheme.

26. Work Programme 2015-2016

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services regarding the development of its work programme for 2015/2016.

Resolved – (1) That, subject to the additions to the programme as set out in these minutes, the Committee's updated work programme be noted.

(2) The Chair requested that any member wishing to add items for consideration within the Committee's 2016/17 Work Programme forward details of the matter to the Chair or the Committee Officer.