

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 20 MARCH 2017

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Bushell, Mark Dempsey, Claire Ellis (Vice-Chair), Emma Faramarzi, Cathy Martyn, Gemma McCracken, Kevin Parry, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts and Steve Weisinger

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Des Moffatt and James Robbins

71. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Gemma McCracken made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 “Consideration of Cabinet decisions”, on the grounds that her husband is a tenant of a commercial unit in the Town Centre.

72. Public Question Time

Mr Brian Cockbill, a local resident, submitted questions about public transport in Swindon. Mr Cockbill was not in attendance. The Chair asked for the written response, available at the meeting, be sent to Mr Cockbill.

73. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 1st and 13th February 2017, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

74. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 15th March 2017.

105. Budget Management 2016/17

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice Chair of the Cabinet and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey and Chris Watts on the following matters:

- Representations made to Central Government in regard to the Council’s financial settlement and the settlement received by other Councils.
- The Council’s plans for meeting overspends during 2016/17.
- Swindon Borough Council’s position with regard to reforms of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Resolved – That Minute 105 of the Cabinet be noted.

106. Capital Monitoring Quarter 3 2016/17

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice Chair of the Cabinet and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Gemma McCracken, Cathy Martyn and Chris Watts on the following matters:

- The potential to obtain sponsorship from local businesses to offset the purchase price of a replacement incident command vehicle.
- Funding for the developments at 1-3 Farringdon Road and the Mechanics Institute.
- Recovery of costs for the scaffolding used at the Mechanics Institute.
- The location and storage costs of museum artefacts.
- Overspends on Junction 16 improvements linked to the Wichelstowe development.
- The current status of the Tabernacle stones.

Resolved – That Minute 106 of the Cabinet be noted.

107. A Sustainable Future for Lydiard House and Park

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

- The process undertaken in assessing the bids received for Lydiard House and Park.
- Contingency plans should the preferred bidder experience financial difficulties.
- Monitoring and scrutiny of the preferred bidder's performance in operating Lydiard House and Park.

Resolved – That Minute 107 of the Cabinet be noted.

108. Barnfield Solar farm Scheme

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

- Latest position with regard to the Council's application for European Regional Development funding for Solar Farm projects and the M4 scheme at Wichelstowe
- The future of Solar Farm Schemes.

Resolved – That Minute 108 of the Cabinet be noted.

109. Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance policy

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Cabinet, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Gemma McCracken on the following matters:

- The target audience of the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.
- Abbreviations used throughout the Policy and potential for a plain English version of the Policy.

Resolved – That Minute 109 of the Cabinet be noted.

110. Changes to Household Waste recycling Centre Opening Times

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Cabinet, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Claire Ellis, Emma Faramarzi, Gemma McCracken and Chris Watts on the following matters:

- Assessments undertaken in approving the reduction of opening times at the Household Recycling Centre, the financial implications and impact on residents.
- The statistics for fly tipping in Swindon.
- The percentage of trade waste received at the Recycling Centre.
- Public consultation undertaken with regard to the reduced opening times.
- Current usage figures for the Recycling Centre.
- Information regarding green waste received at the Recycling Centre.
- Reduction in the number of local recycling sites.
- Statistical information from Parish Councils on fly tipping.
- The service profile and usage figures for the Recycling Centre.

Resolved – That Minute 110 of the Cabinet be noted.

111. The Forward Strategy for Delivering Economic Development and regeneration in Swindon

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillor Mark Dempsey on the following matters:

- The future role of Forward Swindon Ltd and the funding arrangements for the delivery of town centre regeneration.
- Consideration of heritage issues during the delivery of projects in the town centre.
- Proposals for the Mechanics Institute and consideration of alternative approaches for its regeneration from interested resident groups.
- Alternative approaches to the delivery of town centre regeneration projects.

Resolved – That Minute 111 of the Cabinet be noted.

112. Commercial Investment Strategy: Establishment of a Housing Development Company

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice Chair of the Cabinet and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Emma Faramarzi and Chris Watts on the following matters:

- The inclusion of affordable housing within future developments undertaken by the Housing Development Company.
- Identification of parcels of land for development and plans to meet housing targets.
- Concern at developers delaying the building of homes to realise increases in land values.
- The need to reassess developments areas.
- Self-building at the Windmill Hill site.

Resolved – That Minute 112 of the Cabinet be noted.

75. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice Chair of the Cabinet and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his portfolio of responsibility:

- Financial Management overview
- Medium Term Resourcing Plan and future budget planning
- Procurement
- HR, Personnel and Trade Union Relations
- Schools HR
- Council's Transformation Programme
- Corporate Performance Management
- Risk Management
- Customer Services
- Health and Safety
- Operational Buildings and Property
- Revenue and Benefits Policy
- Member Development
- Commercial Investment Fund

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Holland, in his presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within his 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 in relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond, particularly in relation to on-going budgetary constraints.

Councillor Holland responded to the following observations and questions from the Chair and Councillors Emma Bushell, Mark Dempsey, Gemma McCracken, Kevin Parry, Emma Bushell, Chris Watts and Steve Weisinger:

- The current financial position of the Council, the reasons for the current debt position and future strategies to tackle debt.
- Housing Revenue Account debt.
- Specialism gaps within the Health and Safety Team.
- Staff satisfaction survey and the morale of staff.
- The role of the newly appointed Absence Officers.
- Introduction of leadership development programmes and their impact on the organisation.
- Staff absence and main causes.
- The collaboration between People Development and Health and Safety Teams.
- Targets for the reduction in absences.
- Measuring staff absences with the Bradford Formula.
- The Council sites where absences occur more frequently.
- Staff questionnaire and questions about the working environment.
- Securing a sustainable future for the Highworth Recreation Centre by transferring the operation to a new provider.
- The changes being made to Empty Council Tax properties for 2017/18.
- Impact on residents and the Council of the reduced Benefits Cap and the Universal Credit system.

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

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

76. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within her portfolio of responsibility:

- Children and Family Services including Early Help, Youth Offending Team, Young Person Substance Misuse team, Targeted Mental Health, Education Welfare, Educational Psychology, Youth Engagement, Services for Disabled Children and the Troubled Families programme.
- Children's Social Work Services including the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), fostering and adoption services and the Corporate Parenting Board, Opal Team (Child sexual exploitation service).

- Community Health Services including Health Visitors, School Nurses and Family Nurse Partnership, Paediatric Therapy Services, Speech and Language and Portage and Public Health services for children.
- Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).
- Education Services including, Provision for Early Years, LA Maintained Schools, Provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Education Other Than At School, Tuition Service, Championing Excellence and Promoting High Standards. This includes the Education Strategy Board; Schools' Forum, the Music Service, Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre, Governor Support services and Traded services to schools.
- The Cabinet Member for Children's Services is also responsible for delivering some aspects of Priority Two (Pledges 15 and 17), and Priority Four (Pledges 28 and 29) of Swindon's vision for 2016-2020.

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Foley, 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 in relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond, particularly in relation to on-going budgetary constraints.

Following her introduction of the report, Councillor Foley responded to the following observations and questions from the Chair and Councillors Emma Bushell, Claire Ellis, Mark Dempsey, Gemma McCracken, Cathy Martyn, Chris Watts and Steve Weisinger:

- The work being undertaken in Swindon to combat Child Sexual exploitation.
- Swindon Challenge and its involvement in raising education standards and the retention of teaching staff.
- The challenges facing primary and secondary education in Swindon.
- Concern regarding the performance of the UTC.
- The importance of building partnerships between the UTC and local industry.
- Publicising the work of the Council and Swindon Challenge to parents.
- The remit of Swindon Challenge.
- The role of private fostering and the challenges currently being faced within fostering.
- Retention of foster carers.
- Domestic violence and issues with compulsive behaviours.
- Healthy Schools programme and voluntary immunisations.
- Reductions in the youth engagement programme.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Foley 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 them via the Committee Officer.

77.

Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2016/17 Scrutiny Work Programme as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 20th June 2016.

Resolved – That the work programme 2016/17 be noted.

78.

Status of Requests for Action and/or Information

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

Resolved – That the report on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information be noted.