

Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

Author:	Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills Head of Education: Strategic Commissioner Routes to Employment
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report informs Cabinet of a new initiative called "Swindon: A Learning Town" which is being developed as an important part of Swindon Challenge and has the overall aim to raise aspirations, improve educational attainment, improve the profile of the importance of learning and its potential to improve lives.
- 1.2 The report is necessary because the Learning Town initiative will raise educational standards by engaging a wide range of partners across the town including local business, cultural and community organisations and all those engaged in education and training. The focus will be to raise the profile of the benefits of learning and celebrate achievement whilst raising the aspirations of children, young people and adults. .
- 1.3 The "Swindon: A Learning Town" initiative links into one of the key priorities of the council's vision for Swindon. Priority 2 is focused on education and includes a number of corporate performance measures to improve education, skills and employment outcomes. .

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the principle of developing the "Learning Town" concept in Swindon, the key objectives, governance arrangements and timescales for development and delivery outlined in the report,
- 2.2 Commit to champion the concept of "Swindon: A Learning Town" and to authorise the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment and the Cabinet Office for the Economy and Skills to support the concept.
- 2.3 Endorse the financial arrangements outlined in the report.

3. Detail

- 3.1 Key Council strategies including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Economic Strategy outline the importance of good educational outcomes and

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Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

lifelong learning in order for residents to fulfil their potential, be able to compete for jobs, make a contribution, and to be resilient to life's challenges. The Swindon Challenge Action Plan and the Skills and Employment Strategy outline the key activities in place to work with partners to improve educational outcomes and ensure the right opportunities are in place for residents. The strategies indicate a need for to raise aspirations in Swindon and has highlighted that not all communities and families see the benefit of education and learning to improve their lives.

Swindon Challenge and "Swindon: A Learning Town"

- 3.2 The Swindon Challenge programme began in January 2017 and has already had a beneficial impact in supporting the improvement of standards in Swindon schools. For example, provisional results for primary schools for children in their phonics tests, Key Stage One SATs and Key Stage Two SATs have shown a marked improvement over 2016. Outcomes from Ofsted inspections in primary schools put Swindon in the top quartile of local authorities in the country.
- 3.3 The "Swindon: A Learning Town" initiative is being developed because there is a need to raise the profile of the benefits of learning and in doing so raise aspirations of some young people and adults in the borough. Swindon has a relatively low rate of young people moving on to higher education and has been identified as a 'cold spot' by the Higher Education Funding Council. In some wards in Swindon only 8% of young people move on to university or other forms of higher education.
- 3.4 GCSE results in secondary schools have been consistently lower than the national average over a number of years and not enough young people have been achieving the higher grades to enable them to progress to A levels and do well on these courses. There have been some improvements in recent years for example in the considerable improvement at Swindon Academy and Nova Hreod Academy but there is still a lot more to do.
- 3.5 Swindon is also benefiting from a number of initiatives to boost educational achievement in the Borough.
 - 3.5.1 Oxford Brookes University have obtained approximately £1.2 million over the next two years for a programme called Study Higher. This is to work with young people between the ages of 14-19 in order to increase the percentage of young people accessing higher education. As part of Study Higher, the Council has worked with all schools and colleges and an organisation called Villiers Park to secure over £250,000 over the next two years to target 400 young people to deliver specific activities raise aspirations identified by the schools.
 - 3.5.2 Swindon schools will also have access to three new projects funded through the DfE's Strategic School Improvement Fund. These include the

Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

development through the White Horse Federation of a Swindon College of Leadership in a partnership local business and with Gloucester University and the Open University. Excalibur Teaching School have won a bid to support phonics in the borough whilst Plymouth Teaching School will support the development of Oracy (speaking and listening).

3.6 The learning town initiative is based on a UNESCO idea of learning cities and an approach taken by Bristol to raise aspirations and standards there. In Bristol, the learning city partnership board have developed these aims:

3.6.1 Champion learning as a way to transform lives, communities, organisations and the city: we want everyone to be proud to learn throughout their lives;

3.6.2 Take responsibility for learning across the city, to tackle the systematic challenges that lead to inequality, by sharing our expertise, targeting our resources and taking collective action to add value to the work we do individually; and

3.6.3 Realise a shared vision, deliver change and make a greater impact.

3.7 The learning city initiative has had a considerable impact in Bristol and it is felt that using some of these ideas would support the drive to raise aspirations and outcomes in Swindon. An example of impact has been the dramatic decline in permanent exclusions with schools working together and with a range of provisions for the good of the city. More information on the work in Bristol can be found on <https://www.bristollearningcity.com>

Key objectives

3.8 The key objectives of “Swindon: A Learning Town” will reinforce the objectives of Swindon Challenge and support elements of the Skills and Employment Strategy. The objectives will focus on:

3.8.1 Raise the aspiration and ambition of all children, young people and adults of all ages in their educational attainment.

3.8.2 Raise the profile of life-long learning and education for all to engender an enjoyment of learning across the Borough and a recognition of the wider benefits to improve lives.

3.8.3 Raise achievement and improve the level of qualifications/skills gained by Swindon young people.

3.8.4 Increase the number of students with higher level qualifications and participation in Higher education.

Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

- 3.8.5 Increase the number of young people with STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) qualifications and ensure a good understanding of the employment opportunities requiring STEM.
- 3.9 The exact wording of the objectives will be confirmed by the Swindon Challenge Board at its next meeting in November.

Governance and Funding Arrangements

- 3.10 “A Learning Town” sub-group will be set up as part of Swindon Challenge with a reporting line to the Swindon Challenge Board. This will be chaired by the Corporate Director of Children’s Services with representation from a range of those with interest in taking the Learning Town forward. This will include business leaders, representatives from local, voluntary sector organisations as well as from the education community. A key focus for the sub-group will be a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to encourage young people to obtain STEM qualifications, seek employment in related industries and have the skills and employability to work in Swindon. There is already considerable enthusiasm for this concept from “Switch on to Swindon” ambassadors as well as from schools
- 3.11 Funding for “Swindon: A Learning Town” would come from a number of sources. This would include from Swindon Challenge funding, from adult and community learning and it is hoped to source support and sponsorship from the business community.
- 3.12 The learning town initiative raises the possibility of raising the profile of education in a number of ways. These include:
 - 3.12.1 Having town wide weeks for example to encourage reading, to focus on science and technology, to promote enterprise and learning music and art;
 - 3.12.2 Developing a programme in which senior executives from business and the Council to support and mentor young people in their studies and raise their aspirations;
 - 3.12.3 Having a town wide celebration of success for those young people and adults who have achieved well in their education and who have contributed to education in the town; and
 - 3.12.4 Promote lifelong learning through advertising and showcasing through a website the impact that learning can have on people’s lives.
- 3.13 The potential for town wide initiatives to promote and further improve educational outcomes and aspirations through the Learning Town is clearly there. It could be a very beneficial way of inspiring young people and adult in their learning.

Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Other options for raising standards in education are already included within the Swindon Challenge programme. An alternative option would be not to progress with the learning town initiative but this could be a missed opportunity to engage the whole community in further improving educational opportunities in the town and raising aspirations.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Funding for the “Swindon: A Learning Town” is to come from the allocated budget for Swindon Challenge. No additional resource is available currently but this will be kept under review as the programme develops.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no legal or human rights implications to the report. It is considered that the report’s recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed and a copy is available from the report author. This shows that this initiative may have a positive impact on a range of groups with protected characteristics and also for disadvantaged communities.

Risk Management

- 5.5 The “Swindon: A Learning Town” will be overseen by the Swindon Challenge Board which will ensure that the project is managed within budget and within in the constraints of its remit.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

Swindon A Learning Town

Cabinet

Date: 18th October 2017

8. Appendices

8.1 None.

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme for October 2017.