

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 25 JANUARY 2018

PRESENT:- The Worshipful The Mayor in the Chair; Councillors Junab Ali, Steve Allsopp, Abdul Amin, John Ballman, Ray Ballman, Alan Bishop, Emma Bushell, Matthew Courtliff, Wayne Crabbe, Malcolm Davies, Mark Dempsey, Paul Dixon, Oliver Donachie, Toby Elliott, Claire Ellis, Steph Exell, Emma Faramarzi, Fionuala Foley, Brian Ford, Mary Friend, Jim Grant, John Haines, Dale Heenan, Russell Holland, Fay Howard, Colin Lovell, Mary Martin, Nick Martin, Cathy Martyn, Gemma McCracken, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Derique Montaut, Teresa Page, Stan Pajak, Barbara Parry, Kevin Parry, Garry Perkins, David Renard, Eric Shaw, Carol Shelley, Kevin Small, Gary Sumner, Timothy Swinyard, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Vera Tomlinson, Joe Tray, Chris Watts, Nadine Watts, Steve Weisinger, Keith Williams, David Wood, Robert Wright and Julie Wright.

64. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Robbins and Peter Watts.

65. Communications

The Chief Executive reported that communications had been received from the Right Honourable Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in respect of Minute 34 (Motion – Planning Land Supply).

66. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th November, 2017, be confirmed and signed.

67. Declarations of Interest

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

Councillor Gemma McCracken made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 6 (Council Petition Scheme) as her husband rented a unit at the Carriage Works.

Councillors Paul Dixon and Jane Milner-Barry made non-prejudicial and personal declarations of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 6 (Council Petition Scheme) as they were members of Friend of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

Councillor Toby Elliott made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 7(a) (Motion – Great Western Railway) as he was employed by Network Rail.

Councillor Matthew Courtliff made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 7(a) (Motion – Great Western Railway) as he was employed by Network Rail and he was also a member of the Unite Trade Union.

68.

Public Question Time

Mrs Rebecca Poole submitted written questions regarding the Swindon Capital Special Educational Needs consultation published on 15th December 2017. The Council was advised that Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment had provided written responses to Mrs Poole's questions and that these had been circulated at the meeting.

Mr Martin Newman submitted a written question regarding the Swindon Museum and Arts Gallery petition to be considered later in the meeting. The Council was advised that the Leader of the Council had provided a written response to Mr Newman's question and that this had been circulated at the meeting.

Mr Martin Costello asked a question regarding the proposed location of the Swindon Museum and Arts Gallery. The Leader of the Council responded at the meeting.

69.

Council Petition Scheme

The Council considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services concerning the receipt of a petition containing 2,068 electronic signatures and 423 written signatures, requesting that "the new-build plans be abandoned and that more concerted efforts are made to create a new Swindon Art Gallery and Museum in a more historically appropriate site".

In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, Ms Ana Kelly introduced the petition on behalf of the petitioners.

Councillor David Renard moved, Councillor Jim Grant seconded and Councillor Stan Pajak supported:

"(1) That the lead petitioner be thanked for bringing this matter to the Council's attention.

(2) That the Council's support for the submission made by the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Trust to the Heritage Lottery Fund in November 2017 be reaffirmed."

The Motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

(Councillor Gemma McCracken made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of this item as her husband rented a unit at the Carriage Works.)

(Councillors Paul Dixon and Jane Milner-Barry made non-prejudicial and personal declarations of interest in respect this item as they were members of Friend of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.)

70.

Motion - Great Western Railway

Councillor Dale Heenan moved and Councillor Barbara Parry seconded:

This Council notes:

- The massive investment by GWR and Network Rail in the railways serving Swindon, with new increased capacity trains coming into service.

However, this Council also notes:

- Swindon residents pay among the highest per mile train fares in the UK for peak time travel and tickets bought on the day, an anomaly that dates back many decades.
- Young people aged 16 to 18 who are still in school, at college, in training or an apprenticeship who may face an undue cost simply to reach their places of education even with a Young Person's Railcard, because of the decades old distortion of the fares from Swindon.

This Council welcomes the fact that:

- The Government has launched a consultation on the future of the Great Western Franchise, that includes addressing the historical season ticket fare differences

Council requests that:

- The Leader of the Council make a submission to the consultation on behalf of the Council seeking action to tackle the high fares and its historical issues.
- Cabinet Members and Officers find ways to encourage residents and businesses to submit their own consultation responses through campaigns such as Switch On To Swindon and local media.

Councillor Mark Dempsey moved and Councillor Chris Watts seconded that the Motion be amended to read:

“This Council:

- Notes Swindon has some of the highest ticket prices in Europe.
- Notes the annual cost of £9,448 for a season ticket to London penalises Swindonians travelling to work in London.
- Notes the recent bailout of Virgin East Coast has cost the British taxpayer millions and that since this franchise has been run under public ownership it has returned over £1bn to the exchequer.
- Recognises that the current GWR Franchise contract expiration in 2019 presents an opportunity for change.

- Requests the Leader of the Council responds to the government consultation on the future of the GWR Franchise, asking the government to recognise the overwhelming public appetite for rail renationalisation and bring the GWR franchise back in to public ownership.”

The Amendment was put to the vote and declared lost.

The Substantive Motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

(Councillor Toby Elliott made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of this item as he was employed by Network Rail.)

(Councillor Matthew Courtliff made non-prejudicial and personal declaration of interest in respect of this item as he was employed by Network Rail and a member of the Unite Trade Union.)

71. Motion - Universal Credit

Councillor Emma Bushell moved and Councillor Bob Wright seconded:

“This Council:

- Notes that in Swindon as of November 17th there were 1,080 council tenants on Universal Credit and that 77% of these tenants are in rent arrears, with an average arrears of £655.70, so Universal Credit arrears comprise 54% of all arrears of current tenants.
- Recognises this much higher figure for people on Universal Credit is inevitably the result of the Government’s decision to delay benefit payments to claimants being processed for Universal Credit.
- Is concerned that there are 3,000 more council tenants who will have to progressively transfer onto Universal Credit.
- Believes it is the Council’s duty as a responsible landlord to defend council tenants who have or will be forced into personal debt and poverty as a consequence of the Universal Credit rollout.
- Supports the Swindon Tenants Campaign Group’s proposal that during the Universal Credit processing period claimants should continue to receive their existing benefits.
- Requests the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety to write to Swindon’s two Members of Parliament and the Housing Minister setting out the Council’s view on the processing of Universal Credit.”

Councillor Cathy Martyn moved and Councillor Russell Holland seconded that the Motion be amended to read:

“This Council

- Recognises the need for reform to the benefits system
- Notes that in Swindon as of November 17th there were 1,080 council tenants on Universal Credit and that 77% of these tenants are in rent arrears, with an average arrears of £655.70, so Universal Credit arrears comprise 54% of all arrears of current tenants.
- Requests that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety and Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation continue to monitor carefully the implementation of universal credit and take such steps as are necessary in order to assist people in financial difficulty, and keep the Borough's Members of Parliament informed on this matter."

The Amendment was put to the vote and declared carried becoming the Substantive Motion.

The Substantive Motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

72. Motion - Road Traffic

Councillor Kevin Small moved and Councillor Steph Exell seconded:

"This Council:

- Notes the traffic gridlock that has occurred in Rodbourne and West Swindon, as well as other areas of the borough, over the Christmas period.
- Notes that business owners in Rodbourne have expressed their intention to relocate because of the daily traffic gridlock in the Rodbourne area and that Rodbourne residents are equally frustrated with this.
- Notes that Mannington and Western Councillors wrote to the Cabinet Member for Highways and the Leader of the Council urging them to take action to alleviate the traffic problems in traffic hotspot areas of the town. At the time of this motion being submitted, Council notes that Mannington and Western Councillors have not received a reply to their letters.
- Recognises that with other planning applications approved, like the North Star and Eastern Villages Development, the borough may face an additional traffic burden in future years.
- Requests the Cabinet Member for Communities and Place to establish a Cross-Party Cabinet Member Advisory Group to look at ways that the Council can alleviate traffic gridlock in the town both now and in the future."

The Motion was put to the vote and declared lost.

73. Motion - Evening Town Centre Residents Parking

Councillor Bob Wright moved and Councillor Paul Dixon seconded:

“This Council:

- Notes it has a surplus of day time car parking which should satisfy foreseeable Town Centre demand and that this demand is very low in the evening leaving large areas of unused parking.
- Recognises that the current evening Town Centre Residents Parking scheme does not have a large take up and that this is likely due to the prohibitive £625 cost. As a consequence revenue opportunities have been lost and pressure is placed on the Town Centre’s limited free parking spaces.
- Believes a more attractive charge would produce a new revenue stream for the Council and provide an attraction to home buyers wishing to locate to the Town Centre.
- Requests the Cabinet to review the current evening Town Centre Residents Parking scheme and see if more advantages for Swindon can be delivered by having an evening Residents Parking scheme to sit alongside the existing 24 hours scheme.”

With the agreement of the mover and seconder of the Motion the Motion was amended to read:

“This Council:

Notes:

- It has a surplus of daytime car parking which should satisfy foreseeable Town Centre demand and that this demand is very low in the evening leaving large areas of unused parking.
- The review of Town Centre Residents parking scheme undertaken in December 2017 and that surplus from on-street car parking income is ring-fenced by statute for car parking purposes only and cannot be an additional revenue stream to be spent by for the Council for other purposes.”

Requests:

The Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills bring a report to Cabinet considering proposals to:

1. Amend the Residents Parking Scheme that includes a 'Town Centre zone' & 'Old Town Centre Zone' to enable residents not included in the existing zones and living within this area to purchase a permit to park at any time in the town centre long stay car parks (£299 per year, £149 for 6 months), or park between 6.00pm and 9.00am only (£149 per year).
2. Undertake a review of this change after one year."

In accordance with Standing Order 9(1) the Motion stood deferred to the Cabinet without debate.

74. Motion - Hermitage Surgery

Councillor Nadine Watts moved and Councillor Jane Milner-Barry seconded:

“This Council:

- Notes a request from Hermitage Surgery to see if there were any schemes that may be available to the surgery that would allow its Doctors and Nurses to park at a discounted rate at nearby public car parks, due to the lack of parking spaces allocated to the surgery.
- In light of the fact that the surgery is a publicly funded organisation that was only able to continue thanks to it merging with another Swindon medical practice, believes there is a strong case for a discounted parking rate be offered to staff at the medical practice in nearby public car parks.
- Requests the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills bring a report to Cabinet to review ways the Council can support the Hermitage Surgery in finding affordable parking spaces for their staff.”

The Motion was put to the vote and declared lost.

75. Equalities Advisory Forum - Terms of Reference

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Digitalisation and the Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a joint report setting out recommendations from the Equalities Advisory Forum to amend its status to a Cabinet Member Advisory Group and amend its Terms of Reference.

Councillor Keith Williams moved and Councillor David Renard seconded:

“(1) That it be agreed that the status of the Equalities Forum be changed to a Cabinet Member Equality Advisory Group.

(2) That the revised Terms of Reference set out in the appendix to the joint report of the Corporate Services and Digitalisation and the Director of Law and Democratic Services be agreed.”

The Motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

76. Minutes of Cabinet and Decisions Delegated to Cabinet Members

The Council considered (a) the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th December 2017, and (b) questions to the Cabinet Members regarding their portfolio responsibilities and answers received.

77.

Minutes of other Council Bodies

The Council (a) received the minutes set out in the “Minutes of Other Council Bodies” circulated with the Agenda, and (b) considered questions to Chairs relating to the work of their Committees and other bodies and answers received.

78.

Councillors Question Time

The Director of Law and Democratic Services reported that Standing Order 15 Questions had been received from Councillors Steve Allsopp, Jim Grant, Jane Milner-Barry and Des Moffatt.

Councillor Steve Allsopp asked a supplementary question in relation to the creation of a water re-fill scheme in Swindon. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Place responded at the meeting.

Councillor Steve Allsopp asked a supplementary question regarding the void property contract for Housing Revenue Account properties. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety responded at the meeting.

Councillor Jim Grant asked a supplementary question in relation to operation of the Voter ID Pilot Scheme. The Leader of the Council responded at the meeting.

Councillor Jane Milner-Barry asked a supplementary question in relation to the required building certifications for the North Star development. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration responded at the meeting.

Councillor Des Moffatt asked a supplementary question in relation to the VAT Status of Lydiard House Trust. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration responded at the meeting.

Councillor Des Moffatt asked a supplementary question in relation to legal options available to use against utility companies not fulfilling their obligations in respect of reinstating road surfaces after work. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Place responded at the meeting.

Councillor Des Moffatt asked a supplementary question in relation to the disposal of white goods by Housing Wardens. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Place responded at the meeting.