

SCRUTINY

MONDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2018

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Bushell, Fionuala Foley, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Barbara Parry, James Robbins, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts, Steve Weisinger and Caryl Sydney-Smith

Also in attendance were: Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment), Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment) and Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Tim Swinyard.

37. 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 Barbara Parry made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Consideration of Decisions of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation) as her place of employment is Ridgeway School.

38. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

39. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved: That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in item 10, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information (Minute 45 refers).

40. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman asked questions, as a resident of Haydon Wick, regarding the Council's proposals for housing, specifically:

- a) The total number of houses the Council aims to build as part of its local plan up to 2026.
- b) The present total number of houses built.
- c) Whether the Council undertakes rolling reviews of its plans for housing, how often it is undertaken, and where it is published.

Mr Richard Bell, Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage, responded to Mr Worman's questions at the meeting.

Mr Worman asked questions, as the Chairman of Haydon View Community Association, regarding the Council's plans for flood risk management, specifically:

- a) Whether the Council will be inviting submissions from stakeholders during the flood risk review being undertaken in 2019, and if those stakeholders will receive responses.
- b) The maintenance undertaken by the Council on its ditches, brooks and rivulets during the previous five years.
- c) The likelihood of Parish Councils undertaking the maintenance of ditches, brooks and rivulets in the future.

The Chair advised that a written answer would be provided to question a) in accordance with the Public Question Time protocol. Councillor Gary Sumner, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Mr Steve Jorden, Corporate Director for Communities and Housing, responded to Mr Worman's other questions at the meeting.

41. Consideration of Decisions of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation held on 14th November 2018.

Minute 15. Proposal to lower the age range of Bridlewood Primary School to include nursery provision for 2, 3 and 4 year olds and Minute 16. Proposal to lower the age range of Nythe Primary School to include nursery provision for 2, 3 and 4 year olds

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment) responded to questions put by Councillors Des Moffatt, Chris Watts, and the Chair on the following matters:

- Details of the membership of this Cabinet Panel on School Organisation, the strict legal process it conformed to, and how membership information can be presented in the future.
- The projected population numbers of children in the profile areas for both Bridlewood Primary School and Nythe Primary School to seek reassurance that these decisions will not place the future capacity of non-nursery places at these schools at risk.
- How forthcoming cuts to the Dedicated School Grant may affect the viability of the proposals.
- Detail concerning the opposition put forward in response to the proposals.

Resolved – (1) That Minutes 15 and 16 of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation be noted.

(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.

42. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning

Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning), was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his portfolio of responsibility:

- Have overview of the Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Planning Framework.
- Provide political leadership for the New Eastern Villages programme.
- Promote Sustainability.
- Have overview of the Wichelstowe Joint Venture.
- Set the direction for future strategic infrastructure programmes to support economic growth.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's vision for 2016-2020:

- Construct solar arrays on Council-owned land at Common Farm, Chapel Farm and a solar noise barrier along roads including the M4 at Wichelstowe.
- Make the case to Government to invest in a Thamesdown Drive extension and surrounding road improvements.
- Develop Council-owned brownfield sites at Oakfield, and other sites as they become available, for housing.
- Improve highway linkages to the Eastern Villages, particularly around the White Hart roundabout.
- With Barratt Homes we will build up to 3,500 homes in Wichelstowe including the development of a district centre.
- Deliver a borough-wide approach to increase the impact of volunteering, enabling more people to be active citizens in their communities.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning also has responsibility for the following delegated responsibilities:

- Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability
- Building Control and Local Land Charges
- Housing Strategy
- Design-based consultancy
- Wichelstowe (Commercialisation)
- Strategic flood and water management
- Street Naming

Councillor Sumner responded to the observations and questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Fionuala Foley, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Jim Robbins, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts, Steve Weisinger and the Chair on the following matters:

- The projected route of the canal through the New Eastern Village proposals, with particular reference to those land promoters who are requesting its redirection, and the possible reasoning for this given the typical revenue enhancing value of a canal.
- The potential need for aqueducts and bridge features along the projected route of the canal, noting that the majority of the canal is being delivered across the flood plain.
- The proposals for the Kingsdown site not yet containing agreements on all the land for possible inclusion, potentially leading to transport and education issues.
- The range and complexity of the other factors involved when moving forward with large, strategic development sites such as Kingsdown.

- The level of influence the Council has upon the building of new houses by private developers, and the impact this causes on the achievability of 1,625 being built per annum.
- Confirmation of the viability of the former playground in Bergman Close for housing development, in liaison with St Andrew's Parish Council which supports this idea.
- The increased number of houses expected to be built per year given the lag in numbers built during the first year of the Local Plan, noting that there is no specific calculation as to how the lag should be added. A review of the Local Plan would reset the requisite housing figures.
- How any review of the Local Plan would also remove the current stipulation of an extra 200 – 250 new homes a year, imposed by central government, as a penalty for not meeting the requisite number of houses.
- The consideration of objections to particular parcels of land being on the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) site list - based on the social value of the land to residents rather than material planning aspects – during final determination of the sites.
- How the Council has factored in the requirements of the Social Care Act 2012 - to account for the social value of its activities and services to residents - as part of the process of determining SHELAA sites.
- The number of houses built by the private sector during the previous two years, confirmation of the number within that figure that were designated as 'affordable housing', and the projections of these figures in terms of consents going forward.
- Details of the changes being enacted to the enforcement of Building Regulations, by the Building Control Team, which were recommended following the Hackett Review.
- Confirmation of the standards of insulation, with particular reference to fire resistance, in Council-owned properties.
- How the Council is anticipating that revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and review of the Local Plan will help regain control of the housing land supply by the middle of 2020 since housing need and build requirements will be clarified.
- The potential for the Council to build requirements in to planning permissions, promoting immediate building on sites and avoiding 'land-banking'.
- Whether financial constraints affecting the Planning Department are resulting in statutory obligations not being fulfilled. It was noted that any restructure of the team will ensure resources are directed appropriately and performance statistics are not expected to decrease.
- The provision of 150 houses between Highworth and Hannington, and the subsequent effect on Hannington's Neighbourhood Plan which had not accounted for these proposals. It was confirmed that Neighbourhood Plans relate to guiding infrastructure and development which deliver benefits to the community, and are not a tool to try and prevent potential housing sites coming forward.
- Confirmation on the number of officers working in the Planning Department currently as compared to five years ago.
- In terms of planning inspectors assessing the values and merits of proposals and granting appeals, whether the Council has a greater opportunity to defend against promoted sites as opposed to sites with building plans (which have been rejected by Planning Committee).

- The estimated schedule of completion for the remaining phases of development in the Wichelstowe area.
- The liaison with Wiltshire Council regarding strategic planning matters, how a joint approach to planning on cross-border matters is ensured, and any future developments planned on the border with Wiltshire.
- Assistance the Council could provide to rural Parish Councils to help manage and maintain village identities.
- The consequences of granting applications in rural villages that has other available land in the vicinity, and the precedent it sets for other developers to have applications granted.
- Expansion upon the 'buzz' around the centre of the town, and how it bodes well for delivering regeneration of the centre, as referred to in the report.
- The reasoning behind the recent decision to build a car park on the site of the demolished Wyvern Street multi-storey car park, and it being a temporary proposal to facilitate the Fleming Way proposals.
- The protection and maintenance of the green infrastructure corridors in Swindon, and the policy developed through supplementary planning documents to support future green infrastructure wedges.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Sumner 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.

43. Work Programme 2018/2019

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Law (Interim Monitoring Officer) setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2018/2019 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 18th June 2018, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted.

44. 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.

45. A Review of Outsourcing / Business Transfers

The Committee considered a report setting out details of the Council's significant business transfers and service outsourcing transactions that have taken place since 2005. The Committee noted that the appendix to the report distilled the relevant details from the projects and noted the advantages and disadvantages, including the lessons learned from the transactions, with the ambition of improving commissioning capability and practice across the Council.

Councillors Fionuala Foley, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts, Steve Weisinger and the Chair made observations on, and asked questions regarding, the following outsourced services and business transfers:

- Community Centres.
- Leisure Centres.
- Broome Manor and Highworth Golf Courses.
- Swindon Dance, Community Dance.
- Highworth Recreation Centre.
- Various Housing, Construction, Highways, Waste and Street Smart services.
- Power Solutions and Waste Solutions.
- Grass cutting (including graffiti, street cleaning etc).
- Aspire Contract.
- Revenue and Benefits.
- Sure Start replacement services.
- Libraries.
- Regional Adoption Agency.
- The Art Centre.
- Regeneration and Economic Development.

Resolved – (1) To note the contents of the report.

(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.

(3) That the relevant officers be requested to contact St Andrew's Parish Council regarding its potential funding contribution towards the local library.

(4) That the Corporate Director of Children's Services be invited to liaise with the Chair of the Regional Adoption Agency regarding the current time and location of meetings which is proving unsuitable for Swindon representatives.

(5) That the Adults' Health, Adults' Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to add consideration of the outsourced Adult Community Healthcare Services to its Work Programme.