

SCRUTINY

MONDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2019

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Emma Bushell, Fionuala Foley, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, James Robbins, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Timothy Swinyard, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts, and Steve Weisinger.

Also in attendance were: Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance), Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults), Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment), Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment), Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) and Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Des Moffatt and Barbara Parry.

61. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. The following declarations were made:

- Councillor Fionuala Foley made a prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 65 (Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policies), in respect of her employment within the housing sector.
- Councillors Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry and Gary Sumner made prejudicial declarations of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 65 (Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policies) in their capacity as landlords.
- Councillor Robert Wright (Chair) made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the Cabinet Item 10 (Library Strategy) in his capacity as he was a member on the Swindon Community Library Trust.

62. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

63. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, a Haydon Wick resident, asked questions regarding the Council's library proposals, specifically:

- a) The lack of comparative visions and cost analysis for both the Council's and PS Mutual's projects in the report.
- b) How the Council envisaged the role of librarians in the future.
- c) Whether the Council had considered the option of merging with Libraries West.

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, and Sally Burnett, Head of Skills and Lifelong Learning, responded to Mr Worman's questions at the meeting.

Mr Worman raised his concern that the hearing loop in the meeting room was not effective.

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, acknowledged Mr Worman's concern and asked the officers to investigate.

64. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 6th February 2019.

Item Number Minute 65. Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policies

Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, with the assistance of the Head of Housing, and the Service Manager, Healthy Neighbourhoods, responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Emma Faramarzi, James Robbins, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The Council's methods of identifying rogue landlords and actions taken to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.
- The various methods used to report private sector housing issues.
- The resources and funding utilised to enforce the provisions of the Housing Planning Act 2016 to ensure tenant safety.
- The successful implementation of the Safe and Warm Scheme in Swindon.
- The use of the Council's electoral registration scheme to identify issues of over occupancy.

Councillor Fionuala Foley made a prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 65 (Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policies), in respect of her employment within the housing sector.

Councillors Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry and Gary Sumner made prejudicial declarations of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 65 (Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policies) in their capacity as landlords.

Resolved – That Minute 65 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 56. Budget 2019/20 and Beyond

The Leader of the Council and Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, with the assistance of the Director of Finance, responded to questions put by Councillors James Robbins, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The Diversity Impact Assessment carried out on the effect of a 5% standard uplift on fees and charges.
- Budget provision in respect of the County Ground improvement.
- The details of the Revenue Support Grant settlement.
- The projected reserves at the end of the current financial year and its planned allocation.

- The statements made by the Local Government Association on behalf of the sector regarding financial challenges being faced by councils.

Resolved – That Minute 56 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number Minute 57. Capital Programme 2019/20

The Leader of the Council and Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by Councillors Vera Tomlinson, Jane Milner-Barry and the Chair on the following matters:

- The reasons for the allocation of £348k from Section106 funding to Blunsdon Parish.
- The full review of Coate Water Park facilities being undertaken to ensure sustainability and how any identified work would be financed.
- The breakdown of the budget being allocated for the improvement of Rodbourne Park and Park Lane.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 57 of the Cabinet be noted.

2) That the Director of Finance be requested to circulate information on how Blunsdon Parish was allocated funding under Section106.

(3) That the Corporate Director of Communities and Housing be requested to circulate preliminary information regarding the LTP budget allocated for Rodbourne Road and Park Lane.

Item Number Minute 58. Treasury Strategy Statement 2019/20

The Leader of the Council and Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by the Chair regarding the proposed use of reserves to support the Council's budget proposals.

Resolved – That Minute 58 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number Minute 59. Housing Revenue Account - Rents and Charges 2019/20

Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, with the assistance of the Head of Housing, responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Jane Milner-Barry, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The improved communications and interaction between council and DWP staff as a result of the meeting held with the Department of Work and Pensions government officials last year regarding Universal Credit.
- How the void allowance presented in the report related to all void council properties, the reasons for paying a void allowance and how the Housing Revenue Account to be presented to Cabinet early in the new financial year would reflect current performance.
- Improving the energy efficiency of council properties and discussions to be undertaken regarding provision of energy efficient vehicles for the in-house workforce.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 59 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Head of Housing be requested to circulate data to the Committee comparing the current void allowance financial figures with the previous two years' data.

(3) That the Head of Housing be requested to submit an update on the Housing Revenue Account to Cabinet in the next financial year.

Item Number Minute 60. Swindon Pay Policy Statement 2019

Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services, and Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment, with the assistance of the Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement and Communications, responded to questions put by Councillor James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- Rates of pay for care leavers undertaking an apprenticeship.
- Progress made in addressing pay parity within the Council.
- The approach to the recruitment, remuneration and retention of social workers, particularly in Children's Services, and how an example of practical support included the provision of key worker housing by the Council's Housing Department.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 60 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services be asked to consider a range of support the Council might be able to offer care leavers and apprentices.

Item Number Minute 61. Library Strategy

Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services, and Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment, responded to questions put by Councillors Jane Milner-Barry, James Robbins, Chris Watts, and the Chair on the following matters:

- Details of the commercial approaches to income generation and cost savings being considered by the library service.
- Central library out of hours manning issues.
- The way the community uses libraries had changed resulting in the need for a review of the current library strategy and the implementation of the Public Service Mutual model for all libraries in Swindon.
- Discussions on the consultation paper regarding statutory library provision.

Resolved – That Minute 61 of the Cabinet be noted.

Councillor Robert Wright (Chair) made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the above item as he was member on the Swindon Community Library Trust.

Item Number Minute 62. School Admissions Arrangements 2020-21

Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment, with the assistance of the Head of Education, responded to questions put by the Chair on the following matters:

- The reduction of the published admissions number from 60 to 30 pupils at Bridlewood School.
- The delay in allocating schools places for those pupils applying in-year and the effect this may have on student educational attainment.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 62 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Head of Education be requested to submit a report to the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny on the reasons for the delay in allocating schools places for those pupils applying in-year.

Item Number Minute 63. SEND Home to School Transport

Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment, with the assistance of the Head of Education, responded to questions put by Councillor Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The evaluation of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) to help them remain independent.
- The correlation between allocation of school places and the need of parents with SEND children for transport assistance..
- The assessment of the independent living approach to school transport for children with SEND.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 63 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Head of Education be requested to a) monitor the number of appeals following the introduction of the new policy; b) compare the data to previous year's number of appeals received and c) include this information in his report as detailed in Item Number Minute 62, to be submitted to the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny.

Item Number Minute 64. Statement of Community Involvement in the Planning Process

Councillor Gary Sumner, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, with the assistance of the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services, Libraries and Heritage, responded to questions put by Councillors Fionuala Foley, Jane Milner-Barry, Timothy Swinyard, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- Details of the changes to the consultation time period for planning applications as reflected in the "Revised Swindon Borough Statement of Community Involvement in the Planning Process" document.
- The proposal received by the Chair of Planning to allocate additional time for parish councillors make representation at Planning Committee meetings.
- Discussions on the planning processes timeline as detailed in Appendix 1: Revised Swindon Borough Statement of Community Involvement in the Planning Process.
- Confirmation that currently there were no major development plans being proposed by the government.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 64 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services, Libraries and Heritage be requested to circulate an updated review of the Planning Committee meeting process to include time allowed for parish councilors' questions at planning meetings.

65. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within her portfolio of responsibility:

- Provide the strategic direction for the management of all aspects of the Council's social housing
- Provide strategic direction to reduce and prevent homelessness where possible
- Promote partnership engagement to address rough sleeping
- Provide strategic leadership to promote safe public areas

- Set the strategic vision for the Borough's continuing social development
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

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

- Build new affordable homes including 200 new council homes and 66 units through the Affordable Housing Development programme at sites including the Hawthorns, the Royal British Legion site in Penhill, Townsend House in Old Town and the Former Refuge in Park South.
- Complete the redevelopment of Sussex Square.

Councillor Martyn, with the assistance of the Head of Housing and the Licensing Manager, responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Fionuala Foley, James Robbins, Tim Swinyard, Vera Tomlinson, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- Support for gamblers to help them break their addiction.
- The potential to provide taxi drivers with an additional restricted licence to allow them to accept work from other operators.
- How and when businesses need to apply for a SESAC licence (Society of European Stage Authors and Composers) when planning an event in Swindon and information on the services provided by the department to businesses applying for this licence.
- The promotion and successful implementation of the 'Ask for Angela' joint initiative between Wiltshire Council, the Police and the proprietors of licenced premises and the number of licenced establishments currently participating in the initiative.
- The neutral cost to the Council of pursuing licensing prosecutions
- The location, tenure and projected number of affordable houses in Swindon.
- The support provided for the homeless at day centres and how partnership working with Big Breakfast Plus and the Avon and Wiltshire Primary Mental HealthTrust had improved engagement with the homeless.
- The success of the Council's Temporary Winter Housing Project.
- The procuring of properties by the Housing Department to increase its housing stock.
- Discussions on how clients in under-occupied properties were encouraged to find suitable properties for their needs.
- The successful bid for funding being used to support children with alcohol dependent parents.
- The timescales for completing Fire Safety maintenance at David Murray John building and George Hall Court.
- The need to consider traffic flow to improve air quality at Kingshill, Swindon.
- The proposal to distribute notices to residents and properties in the town centre detailing information regarding help and support available to rough sleepers.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Cathy Martyn 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 Licencing Manager be requested to invite members of the Licencing Committee to a future Pub Watch meeting to review how the 'Ask for Angela' initiative was being implemented.

(3) That the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage be requested to circulate information on the locations of affordable housing schemes in Swindon.

(4) That the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage be requested to review traffic direction and flow to reduce congestion and improve air quality in Kings Hill, Swindon.

(5) That the Head of Housing be requested to circulate notices to residents and properties in the town centre detailing information regarding help and support available to rough sleepers who may be using garages and community places inappropriately.

(6) That the Head of Education be requested to update the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny on the measures proposed to be taken to provide help to children of alcohol dependent parents.

66. Work Programme 2018/2019

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Law 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.

The Committee noted that the next Cabinet meeting on the 13th March 2019 was rescheduled and was now being held on 20th March 2019. The Committee further noted that the next Scrutiny meeting was due to be held on 25th March 2019 and agreed that the meeting on the 15th April 2019 be cancelled.

Resolved – That Committee noted:

- a) The Work Programme for 2018/19.
- b) The next scheduled meeting was now due to be held on the 25th March 2019.
- c) That the meeting on the 15th April 2019 be cancelled.

67. 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.