

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Steve Allsopp, Matthew Courtliff, Steph Exell, Jim Grant, Robert Jandy, Brian Mattock, Des Moffatt, Barbara Parry, Carol Shelley, Timothy Swinyard and Caryl Sydney-Smith.

Also in attendance were: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economy and Place), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), and Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Jane Milner-Barry, Roger Smith and Vera Tomlinson.

21. 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 Brian Mattock made a personal and prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as a Director of Swindon Housing Company Ltd.
- Councillor Steve Allsopp made a personal and prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as a Director of Swindon Housing Company Ltd.
- Councillor Barbara Parry made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as an employee at The Ridgeway School and Sixth Form College.
- Councillor Bob Wright made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 4 (Public Question Time) as a Trustee of the Community and Libraries Trust in North Swindon.
- Councillor Matthew Courtliff made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session – Cabinet Member for Economy and Place) as an employee at Network Rail.

22. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

23. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, a resident of Haydon Wick, asked a number of questions regarding:

- The future proposals and funding for the MUGA @ Haydon Wick.
- The funding of core library services via S106 contributions.

Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council) and Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre) responded at the meeting.

24.

Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 4 September 2019.

Minute 26. Report of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services July 2019

Councillor Renard, assisted by the Corporate Director - Children's Services, responded to questions put by Councillors Allsopp, Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- The challenges in improving the balance between permanent and temporary staff in Children's Social Care Services (which is currently running at 63% agency staff), especially given the £1.25m overspend on employing temporary workers as identified in the Budget Management report for 2019/2020, and how improvements in the Service can be sustained.
- How Government is addressing the regional and national problems with recruitment to Children's Social Care Services. The Committee noted that a training academy for Social Workers will be launching in Swindon in mid-November 2019.
- The political approach adopted when problems in Children's Social Care Services had been identified, and the benefits of adopting a similar approach should other service areas have issues highlighted in the future.
- How budget pressures are affecting the victims of domestic violence and their children, and the combined Housing and Children's Services Panel tasked with looking at these issues.
- The one-off £8m invested to reshape Children's Services and improvements seen as a result. The Committee noted that a comprehensive three-year plan has been put in place, aligned to the budget plan, designed to reduce demand in high cost services and increase ability in early intervention and prevention services.

Resolved – That Minute 26 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 27. Budget Management 2019/20

Councillors Renard and Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economy and Place), assisted by the Corporate Director for Communities and Housing and the Corporate Director for Adult Social Services, responded to questions put by Councillors Faramarzi, Grant, Mattock and the Chair on the following matters:

- The success of the zero-based budgeting exercise undertaken in Children's Services, which identified mitigating savings of £694k, and the plans for rolling this exercise out to other service areas.
- The reasons for the shortfall on the saving linked to the LED replacement programme, and the subsequent delay in procurement.
- The forecasted overspend, which is higher than usual for this time of year, and where savings are being identified to mitigate this.
- The reasons for the shortfall on predicted income from parking and enforcement, and future expectations for revenue.
- How mobile cameras are available for temporary placement in areas where traffic problems have been identified.

- Out of Borough placements and the work being done to bring back people, where possible, in to the Borough.
- The Secretary of State having indicated in a letter to the Leader of the Council that more funding will be allocated to Adults and Children's Services at a national level.

Resolved – That Minute 27 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 28. Capital Monitoring Quarter 1 2019-20

Councillors Renard, Heenan and Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) responded to questions put by Councillor Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- Proposals for the use of the combined underspend of £2.051m from the HRA Small Build Schemes and Sussex Place.
- The £1.5m allocated for the Health Hydro as a result of the conditions survey, which resulted in an agreed capital programme of repair works.
- The £339k spent on Aspen House, which included its demolition.
- The breakdown of funding contributions towards the Bus Boulevard project from the Local Enterprise Partnership, Central Government and the Council.

Resolved – That Minute 28 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 29. Strategic Partnerships – Local Industrial Strategy and Great Western Powerhouse

Resolved – That Minute 29 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 30. Annual Review of Local Ombudsman Complaints

Resolved – That Minute 30 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 31. Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan

Councillors Renard, Donachie, Martyn and Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Grant, Moffatt and the Chair on the following matters:

- The borrowing of funds against the HRA to finance the Queens Drive regeneration, and the Council's plans to build more council houses.
- Plans for the repayment of the amount borrowed against the General Fund to bring forward the New Eastern Villages development.
- The HRA having a sustainable thirty year business plan, with external funding contributions from Homes England.

Resolved – That Minute 31 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 32. Reference from the Health and Wellbeing Board – Swindon Borough Council's Reducing Rough Sleepers Strategy

Councillor Martyn, assisted by the Head of Housing, responded to questions put by Councillors Grant, Swinyard and the Chair on the following matters:

- The relatively small number of former Armed Forces Personnel who are rough sleeping in Swindon and the review of the Armed Services Covenant being undertaken.
- The process by which those with substance misuse and mental health problems are assisted in obtaining a place at Haven.
- The provisions in place to help reduce the numbers of rough sleepers with substance misuse issues in the town centre.
- The Day Centre for rough sleepers, opened in January 2019.
- Progress on the Housing First initiative, which commenced three years ago. The Committee noted that all the Housing First flats in Carfax Street are now occupied, with additional social and psychological assistance being provided.
- That funding had not been directly received for reducing homelessness in the recent spending round.

Resolved – That Minute 32 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 33. Land for the Commercial Housing Programme

Resolved – That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of Minute 33 of the Cabinet meeting held on 4th September 2019, on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in the respective paragraph 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.

Councillors Allsopp and Mattock left the room during discussion of this item.

Councillor Sumner responded to questions put by Councillors Exell, Faramarzi, Grant, Moffatt, Parry, Swinyard and the Chair on the following matters:

- Concerns expressed regarding a proposed site identified in the report, and the existing green infrastructure that will be lost should the site be developed for housing.
- How environmental impact assessments were not completed for the identified sites prior to Cabinet as this is a matter for the planning application process. Detailed consideration of the perceived social impact from development also forms part of the planning process, along with other issues such as Tree Preservation Orders and sites of special scientific or wildlife interest.
- The criteria used to determine the sites identified in the report, which will be circulated to members of the Committee subsequent to the meeting.
- Opportunities afforded to Ward members to inform decision-making on the list submitted to Cabinet, and prior to the planning process commencing.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 33 of the Cabinet 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.

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Economy and Place

Councillor Donachie, Cabinet Member for Economy and Place, 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:

- Set the strategic vision to allow the economy to prosper.
- Provide the political leadership for business growth in all areas including town centre, investment, R&D and tourism.
- Ensure Swindon has the ability to be part of the next generation of Digital & Smart Cities.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Place is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's Vision:

- 1. Set the ambition for Swindon to compete to at the forefront of digital innovation with a commitment to using technology for positive change.
- 2. Enhance Swindon's reputation as a sustainable energy exemplar, by exploring technology that converts energy from waste, facilitating the move to electrified transport, and delivering opportunities to invest in renewable energy to reduce carbon footprint.
- 3. Refresh and implement the Masterplan for Swindon Town Centre, supporting our vision that Swindon is a vibrant, modern place. We will do this through "g) Working with ambassadors and partners to promote Swindon effectively to improve the town's reputation, increase income from business rates and compete for the best business growth opportunities, inward investment and talent."
- 4. Support businesses by working in partnership to create conditions in which businesses succeed and grow.
- 16. Deliver a programme of work to ensure that residents, visitors and businesses feel that Swindon is a safe place to live, work, visit and do business.

The Committee noted that the Cabinet Member for Economy and Place has delegated responsibility for:

- Representing the Council on the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- Strategic Asset Management of employment / business land.
- Country Parks (securing sustainable uses) – excluding Lydiard.
- Enforcement and Regulatory Services.
- Envirocrime.
- Renewable energy.
- To lead on the implementation of PSPOs, in collaboration with Cabinet colleagues.
- Tourism.
- Client for PPS.

Councillors Donachie and Renard, with assistance from the Corporate Director for Communities and Housing, the Head of Strategic Growth, and the Inward Investment Officer, responded to questions put by Councillors Allsopp, Courtliff, Faramarzi, Mattock, Moffatt and the Chair on the following matters:

- Enforcement of the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in conjunction with the Police, and forthcoming changes to the way in which envirocrime, enforcement and regulatory programmes operate.
- Raising awareness of and changing attitudes towards the PSPO using signs erected in the town centre and other deterrents such as floor demarcation.
- How the Town Centre Enforcement and Behaviour Change Initiative, going live on 1st October 2019, will be monitored, reported on and maintained.

- The use of body cameras and other equipment to stop speeding cyclists in the town centre. The Committee noted that around 80% of people challenged will comply and dismount, with a specialist response required for the other 20% involving police co-ordination.
- The enhanced enforcement of parking deterrents having led to a doubling of tickets issued, with this number expected to decrease as behaviour is changed.
- Proposals for the Institute of Technology going forward, including when it is expected to be built.
- How the Council is helping the current occupants at the Carriage Works to grow and occupy larger spaces within the complex.
- That a business case for funding the M4 underpass has been submitted, and a response is expected shortly.
- The favourable economy of scale that membership of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) attracts.
- The expected opportunities and benefits from producing a Local Industrial Strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire.
- Development plans for the Cultural Quarter in Swindon using local growth funding from the LEP.
- The opportunities available to help improve the broadband speeds in Swindon, and the Fast and Ultrafast vouchers that members of the public can apply for.
- The development plans for the Kimmersfield site.
- The proposed activities aimed at attracting 'digitech' employees to Swindon through the Switch on to Swindon project.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Donachie 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 the thanks and ongoing support of the Committee be recorded for the ambassadors and businesses involved in Switch on to Swindon.

25. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Economy and Place

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26. Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2019/2020 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 10th June 2019, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That, should the report of the Cabinet Member for Commercialisation and Education and Skills, due at the next meeting of this Committee, duplicate his report to the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it be removed from this Committee's Work Programme.

27. 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.