

## **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2019**

PRESENT:- Councillors Garry Perkins (in the Chair), Steve Heyes, Garry Perkins, Roger Smith, Bazil Solomon and Vera Tomlinson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Ballman and Matthew Courtliff and Janine Howarth.

### **7. Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

### **8. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2019, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **9. Public Question Time**

Mr Peter Gallagher asked a public question seeking clarification as to why under the Armed Forces Covenant the children of the families of serving members of the armed forces needed to go through the school admission appeals process when the Council offered an exemption to them under the class size regulations. He also asked why the Council's admissions team were not provided delegated authority to approve such placements. The Chair indicated that a written response would be provided.

### **10. Armed Forces Community Covenant Review**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing setting out proposed changes to update the review Council's Armed Forces Covenant. The Head of Housing introduced the report drawing Members attention to:

- The priorities and challenges for the public sector in working with armed forces personnel and their families (including those leaving the armed forces and returning or moving to Swindon) in the delivery of appropriate levels of service provision.
- The links between the covenant and the priorities set out within the Swindon Vision.
- Proposed changes to the Council's Armed Forces Covenant highlighted within the appendix to the report.
- The successes arising from the covenant approved by the Council in 2012.
- The public recognition the covenant offered to the members of the armed forces and their families for the sacrifices they made through service to their country.
- The acceptance of the veteran identity card to facilitate a fast tracking of services.

Following his presentation the Head of Housing responded to Members' comments

and questions in respect of:

- The school admissions process and outcome of school admission appeals by families of members of the armed forces.
- Service provision in the key areas of Health, Housing, Education and Social Care.
- The importance of the covenant in recognising the armed forces at a time when budgetary constraints meant that military parades and other publically visible activities were reducing.
- Activities held within the Borough in 2018 to mark the remembrance of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of the First World War and the role Swindon in supporting the armed services during that period.
- The support offered to staff who were armed forces reservists in undertaking activities related to this role.
- Council support in providing housing for serving members of the armed forces and veterans including adaptation work where required.
- The number of dwellings rented to armed forces personnel and veterans and the number of these that required adaptation work.
- Council support for Armed Forces Day and engagements undertaken during the previous year by the Mayor in support of the Armed Forces and its personnel and families.
- The commissioning of mental health care services for veterans by the Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Whether Paragraph 4.13 of the covenant “Swindon’s business community will work with partners to develop a business framework for military personnel/veterans to access employment opportunities once leaving the Armed Forces in partnership with Influence, Swindon’s Business Partnership and Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership” could be broadened to engage the wider business community.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted and the Head of Housing Services be thanked for his presentation and answers to Members’ questions.

(2) That the Head of Housing be requested to consider Members’ comments as part of the review of the Council’s Armed Forces Covenant and submit the revised Covenant to this Committee prior to its adoption.

## **11. Solar Power and Battery Storage Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Managing Director, Public Power Solutions setting out an update on solar power generation and battery storage by Public Power Solutions. Mr Steve Cains, Head of Power Solutions, Public Power Solutions introduced the report and drew Members’ attention to:

- The fairly unique position of Public Power Solutions (PPS) as a Council owned company developing large scale solar farms and battery storage systems.
- The two elements of PPS, the first being waste streams with approximately 55,000 tonnes of waste being processed at the Barnfield plant each year with much of it being turned into green energy for industry; and the second being solar power generation and battery storage.
- The focus of PPS on the public sector (local authorities and central

- government organisations).
- A breakdown of solar energy schemes undertaken in the Swindon area by PPS including Common Farm Phases 1 and 2, Chapel Farm, Barnfield and Wroughton Airfield.
- Council and community funded investment in Solar Energy within the Borough; it was noted that the community investment in Swindon set a precedent for funding solar schemes, although with the loss of Feed-in Tariffs this was less likely to be repeated.
- The loss of Feed-in Tariffs for solar energy generation in 2017 and the subsequent adverse effect this had on the solar industry and short term investment in solar power generation.
- The current solar generation model of zero subsidy for large scale energy production.
- Current and future work, including for outside organisations such as the Ministry of Defence.
- Work on developing more innovative solar schemes in Swindon, and in particular those based at Waterside to move towards the generation, storage and use of solar energy.
- The creation of a 30 megawatt battery storage system at Mannington which link directly into the national grid.

Following his presentation the Head of Power Solutions responded to Members questions in respect of:

- The removal of Feed-in Tariffs for new schemes by Central Government in 2017 and the effect this had on the installation of new solar farms on a local and national level.
- The effect of lower construction costs, the current low borrowing costs for public sector organisations and sale of energy to public sector organisations, which were a stable purchaser over a long period of time that made solar energy viable again following the loss of Feed-in Tariffs.
- The financial benefits to the Council of large scale solar energy farms which included developer fees, rental income for the use of Council owned land, business rates generation, dividend returns and the offsetting electricity costs.
- “Sleeved Power Purchase Agreements” where large companies bought solar energy in a virtual agreement to reduce their energy costs.
- The purchase of PV charging points at the Civic campus for the recharge of electric vehicles.
- Advances in battery technology which made their use more cost effective and efficient.
- The potential loss of green energy generation arising from the removal of Feed-in Tariffs in 2017.
- The investigation of non-solar renewable energy generation.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the Head of Power Solutions be thanked for his presentation.

(Councillor Garry Perkins made a personal declaration of interest in respect of this item in his capacity as a Director of Public Power Solutions and his previous involvement with companies working in the green energy sector.)

**12.**

**Committee Work Programme 2019/20**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Legal Officer setting out the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

Resolved – That the report be noted.