

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2019**

PRESENT: Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Steve Allsopp, Emma Bushell, Jim Grant, Robert Jandy, Brian Mattock, Barbara Parry, James Robbins, Carol Shelley, Roger Smith, Vera Tomlinson and Steve Weisinger.

Also in attendance were: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) and Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Matthew Courtliff and Timothy Swinyard.

### **45. Councillor Des Moffatt**

The Committee noted that Councillor Des Moffatt had sadly passed away recently. A Minute's Silence was held in his honour and in reflection of his contribution to this Committee and other forums.

### **46. 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 Steve Allsopp made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet decisions) as a Director of the Swindon Housing Company.
- Councillor Brian Mattock made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet decisions) as a Director of the Swindon Housing Company.
- Councillor Roger Smith made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet decisions) as an employee of a company involved with the review of the Local Plan.

### **47. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **48. Public Question Time**

Mr Roy Worman, a Haydon Wick resident, asked a number of questions relating to the Leader of the Council's six month update, in particular:

- The timeline for identifying a new use of the Mechanics Institute, potential sources of funding, and the likelihood of a Compulsory Purchase Order being required in the future.

- The impact on Swindon from the potential withdrawal of funding for the Oxford / Cambridge road proposals following the General Election.

The Leader of the Council and the Chair responded to the questions at the meeting.

#### **49. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

##### *Minute 48. Budget Management 2019/20*

Councillors Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills) and Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Jim Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- The voids rents having reduced less than planned in the first half of the year, resulting in a further budget pressure of £43k on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the programme that has been implemented to help reduce these budget pressures and resolve issues and which has brought the voids down to below 100.
- The potential savings to the HRA from staff vacancies, some of which relate to the current consultation on whether to retain in-house warden positions in sheltered housing.
- The scope for members to be involved in budget saving discussions and projects.
- The disruption to the typical budget setting timetable caused by the General Election on 12<sup>th</sup> December and when it is anticipated that this Committee will have consideration of the draft budget proposals prior to February 2020.

Resolved – That Minute 48 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### *Minute 49. Capital Monitoring Quarterly Reports – second quarter 2019/20*

Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Jim Grant, Brian Mattock and the Chair on the following matters:

- The potential risk to the development of the New Eastern Villages scheme from the result of the public enquiry currently taking place in to the proposals for the southern connector road.
- The anticipated pressures on the existing road network should the southern connector road not be built.
- The length of time it would take the Council to build the southern connector road without government assistance.
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) having a Neighbourhood Proportion allocated to the relevant parishes with the remainder being attributed by Cabinet as a whole to agreed priorities.

Resolved – That Minute 49 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### *Minute 50. Treasury Management Performance 2019/20*

Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills) responded to a question put by the Chair on the changes to the Public Works Loans Board finances and the subsequent effects an increased cost of borrowing may have on planned developments by the Council.

Resolved – That Minute 50 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 51. Housing Revenue Account – Housing Development Sites*

Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) responded to questions put by the Chair on how the carbon neutral agenda is taken into account in the design and build of properties.

Resolved – That Minute 51 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 52. Swindon Borough Local Plan Review – Regulation 19 Consultation (submission draft) (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillor James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- How public responses to the consultation will be considered and acted upon.
- How addressing environmental concerns through the Local Plan is limited as it concerns the allocation of suitable sites for development and not the development itself.

Resolved – That Minute 52 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 53. Corporate Customer Feedback Policy*

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence) responded to questions put by the Chair on the reduction in the use of legal jargon within the Policy, and the availability of online / offline options for people wishing to complain.

Resolved – That Minute 53 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 54. Amending the Diversity Impact Assessment Process to strengthen Swindon Borough Council's role as a Corporate Parent*

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence) responded to questions put by Councillor James Robbins and the Chair on the positive move this takes towards placing young people at the centre of policy and service decision-making, and the other initiatives planned to ensure that any potential impact on looked after children is considered and mitigated.

Resolved – That Minute 54 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 55. Adult Community Learning Plan 2019-21 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Resolved – That Minute 55 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 56. Natural England District Licensing Project for Great Crested Newts Habitats*

Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Faramarzi, Roger Smith and the Chair on how the Council respects and protects species and their habitats, and the potential soft changes that could be made through planning conditions to help maintain and improve biodiversity that would not require policy changes.

Resolved – That Minute 56 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Minute 57. Carriage Works Regeneration – Phase II*

Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre) responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Jim Grant and the Chair on the following matters:

- The net increase in the number of people employed as a consequence of Phase 1, and the anticipated net increase in the number of people that will be employed as a consequence of Phase 2. It was agreed that this information would be circulated following the meeting.
- The launch of the Royal Agricultural University Cultural Heritage Institute expected in May 2020, and the numbers of teaching staff, students and ancillary staff this is expected to bring. It was agreed that this information would be circulated following the meeting.
- The variances in payback times, which is dependent on how quickly a unit can be turned around from refurbishment and how quickly it is expected that units will be let out. It was agreed that further information would be circulated following the meeting.
- The certainty regarding projections on income and the guaranteed income from pre-lets so far. The Committee noted that investments are made on a managed-risk basis with no guaranteed income.
- The wider impact this development has had on attracting additional businesses to the area.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 57 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.

*Minute 58. Nythe Road / Oxford Road Capacity Enhancement Scheme: New Eastern Villages (NEV)*

Councillors Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre) and Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Jim Grant, James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- How additional traffic is expected to be managed as a result of this scheme.
- How there are no plans for a dual carriageway on Oxford Road.
- The possibility of work being done on the network travelling from the west of Swindon to the White Hart exchange in response to increased traffic from this scheme.

Resolved – That Minute 58 of the Cabinet be noted.

**50.**

**Leader of the Council: Six Month Update**

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report outlining how the Authority had performed in the first half of the 2019/20 Municipal Year towards the Council's priorities and targets.

Councillor Renard responded to questions put by Councillors Steve Allsopp, Emma Bushell, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, Brian Mattock, James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- The actions taken to improve the traffic issues being experienced in the Rodbourne area. A list of the extra measures planned will be circulated subsequent to the meeting, along with details of any meetings planned with Ward members.
- The possibility of using digital billboards to advise of traffic congestion within the town.
- The increase in the number of staff having received their mid-year appraisal, and the focus of the Chief Executive in improving the quality of appraisal conversations once the regularity of the appraisals has been embedded.
- The work being undertaken to try to ensure that other Local Authorities have a focus on improving the Delayed Transfer of Care figures from the Great Western Hospital for their residents in line with the improved figures for Swindon.
- The partnership activity being undertaken with Central Swindon South Parish Council and Historic England on enhancements to key community buildings and spaces within the Heritage Action Zone.
- The ending of Swindon Programme, which has produced £30m of savings over the last 30 months, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and the plans for continuing the drive for savings and improved efficiencies going forward.
- The work being undertaken to improve and enhance broadband provision across Swindon.
- When the updated Homelessness Reduction Strategy will be available. Further information on this will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The timeline for reviewing success against the Customer Access Strategy, and the drop off in demand as an unintentional result of service changes which will be closely monitored.
- The numbers of young entrants to the labour market shrinking due to falling birth rates, and how this is balanced against the numbers of children moving in to the area.
- The Council's performance on the public provision of charging points for electric vehicles, and how the Parking Strategy will accelerate this delivery.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Renard be thanked for attending the meeting to present his 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.

**51.**

**North Star Regional Leisure Development**

The Committee considered a report setting out progress on the North Star Development trigger points, which had been requested by the Committee as part of its agreed Work Programme for the current Municipal Year.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for the Town Centre, responded to questions put by Councillors Jim Grant, Brian Mattock, James Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- The ability of Severn Capital to fund this project.
- How the Council is the landowner, with Severn Capital being the developer of this scheme.
- The proposals for residential development on this site, and assurances that this will not occur until the leisure complex has been developed. The Committee noted that over 60% of the site has now been pre-let to businesses with signed lease agreements in place.
- Anticipated changes to the scheme as a result of environmental demands.
- The possibility of holding a private and confidential session with Mr Watkins from Severn Capital in the new year to raise concerns and seek responses.

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

(2) That Mr Watkins from Severn Capital be invited to a future meeting of this Committee to respond to members concerns and questions regarding the scheme

## **52. Work Programme 2019/2020**

The Committee considered 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 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year. The Committee considered 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 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

The Chair confirmed that the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 meeting of this Committee will be brought forward to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 following changes made to the timetable for Cabinet meetings.

The Committee noted that a private and confidential session with Mr Watkins at Severn Capital will be incorporated in to the Work Programme, as agreed under Minute 51.

## **53. 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.