

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 13 JANUARY 2020

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

Councillors David Renard and Russell Holland attended with respect of Minute 57 and Councillor Sumner attended with respect of Minute 58.

54. 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 declaration was made:

- Councillor Roger Smith made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) as an employee of a company involved with the review of the Local Plan.

55. Minutes

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Councillor Jim Robbins requested that a copy of the information about the extra measures for the Rodbourne area (Minute 50) be circulated to him.

56. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon Wick resident, asked a number of questions relating to the projected possible budget deficit as well as to the impact of the works at White Hart roundabout.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, Education, and Skills along with Councillor Gary Sumner, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, responded at the meeting.

The Head of Planning, Regulatory Services, and Heritage undertook to provide a written response about making available the data indicating changes to traffic flow after the work at White Hart

57. Budget Setting Process 2020-21

The Committee received a report from the Chief Legal Officer about the Budget setting process for 2020/21.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills to the meeting.

Councillor Holland introduced the report, advising that the General Election in December 2019 had delayed the provision of data about future funding from central government, hence the current funding assumptions contained levels of uncertainty. Councillor Holland expected to be able provide a more detailed report as part of his Cabinet Member Question and Answer item before Scrutiny later in the year.

The Chair along with councillors Steve Allsopp, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, Brian Mattock, and Roger Smith, raised the following issues set out below, to which Councillor Holland and the Leader of the Council responded at the meeting.

- Had the Council modelled the effect additional adult social care funding for the NHS might have?
- How might the council be structured after the next £48m reductions over three years?
- What was the expected effect of increasing Council Tax on empty homes and how many properties might be affected?
- Was greater capital funding needed to reduce out of borough placements?
- How the pensions and benefits system might affect couples where one partner was employed but the other was receiving a pension.
- How councillors could be engaged to help contribute ideas to identify £15m of savings.
- How the Council could involve transferring funds as part of multi-agency working to support partner agencies who might be better placed in some cases to deliver desirable, agreed outcomes.

Resolved: – (1) That the budget position update be noted and that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Education and Skills' responses to questions about the financial context within which the budget proposals have been framed along with the budget and policy framework utilised by the Council in setting its 2020/21 budget also be noted.

(2) That all Cabinet Members be invited to consider for the future how more use could be made of pooled budgets with partner agencies, especially in preventative care cases.

(3) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

58. 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:

- Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Framework Planning
- The New Eastern Villages
- Wichelstowe, Tadpole Garden Village and Badbury Park
- Neighbourhood Planning

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:
Pledge 6:

- Deliver infrastructure in a timely way to assist in phased housing and employment delivery for the New Eastern Villages including White Hart

Junction and A420 □ Working with Barratt Homes through the Joint Venture, we will deliver the District Centre facilities including a public house, the next phases of housing, a retirement complex and education facilities – whilst also delivering new sections of canal

- Create the southern access to Wichelstowe via a tunnel to be constructed under the M4 to link to Junction 16
- Through the Local Plan review, identify brown field and green field sites for housing to deliver homes and employment land on a range of sustainable sites whilst ensuring that urban extensions are of the highest quality
- Continue to work with the developers at Tadpole Garden Village to bring forward facilities to ensure a sustainable community can continue to thrive
- Ensure that there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent
- Work with Nationwide Building Society to deliver homes at the former Oakfield campus
- Support final phases of additional housing at Badbury Park with community space and improvements to Day House Lane to link to Coate Water

Pledge 7:

- In addition to the two new free secondary schools, build one secondary and 13 primary schools to meet the needs of our increasing population

Pledge 15:

- Work to secure a viable and sustainable future for our key heritage assets.

Councillor Sumner responded to questions and issues raised by the Chair along with Councillors Steve Allsopp, Matthew Courtliff, Emma Faramarzi, Jim Grant, Brian Mattock, and Jim Robbins on the following matters:

- In light of the approach by Cornwall Council, should sustainability and responding to climate change be part of the portfolio?
- How the Honda site might prove an asset for businesses in or seeking to move to Swindon.
- How many sites would the local plan need to secure to evince planning inspectors that there was a five-year land supply and how far was the Council from achieving this, thereby regaining more local control over developments?
- How social media channels could be used to encourage response to the Local Plan review consultation?
- How would an Article Four Direction protect high quality office stock from conversion to flats and which areas would be covered by it?
- To confirm that the infrastructure costs for the New Eastern Villages would be covered by government grant or developers' contributions.
- The number of new houses at Wichelstowe sold.
- The number of self-build plots developed or being developed – the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage undertook to provide a written response.
- How was the Council working with the Environment Agency on both on-going flood prevention, inspections, and maintenance as well as strategic policies to protect residents?
- What steps were being taken with other relevant portfolio holders to address the wider issues is the Heritage Action Zones.
- How the complex patterns of land ownership and options might affect the pace and scale of development in the New Eastern Villages.

- The ability to use recent successes in securing 30% affordable housing for future new developments
- How to address providing electrical vehicle charging points for the existing housing stock that lacks them.
- The new policy to allow people, for a fee, to name houses and streets, as set out in paragraph 3.33 of the Cabinet Member's report (page 23 of the agenda pack) along with the outstanding response to a Council resolution to recognise 2016 Olympic medal winner Jazz Carlin (Council Minute 49, 2016/17 refers).
- How the Council would approach planting more trees to offset the carbon impact of new developments – to which officers undertook to provide a written reply.
- How accurately were the figures reflecting demand for services if callers were not able to speak to a member of staff in a timely manner?
- How was the Local Plan addressing the need to increase the number of green, open spaces in the town centre?
- How was the Local Plan addressing the infrastructure routes connecting Swindon to the rest of the country given that the town's location was a key point to its future economic success?

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.

59.

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 10th June 2019, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Further to Minute 42(2) of the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18th November 2019, the Chair sought the Committee's views on how to proceed with the task group on the how to provide a greater role for Scrutiny in policy development as well as in scrutinising decisions taken.

Resolved: - (1) That the committee clerk would send the Chair's briefing note to all councillors,

(2) That the committee clerk would set up a meeting for all Members, including Cabinet, to present their requests for the scope of a task group.

(3) That the Chair would approach the Leader of the Council to determine the Administration's support for any review.

60.

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.