

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillors James Robbins (Chair), Steve Weisinger (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Emma Bushell, Matthew Courtliff, Paul Dixon, Jane Milner-Barry, Barbara Parry, Kevin Parry, Roger Smith, Andy Spry and Timothy Swinyard.

Also in attendance were: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills), Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults and Health), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for Town Centre, Culture and Heritage), Rob Jandy (Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence), Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services), Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning) and Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Climate Change).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jim Grant.

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. Councillor Barbara Parry made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session – Cabinet Member for Children's Services) as she is employed at The Ridgeway School (part of the White Horse Federation).

22. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

23. Public Question Time

Mr Barrie Jennings asked a number of questions relating to the support and funding provided to community leisure centres in Swindon, in particular:

- The process the Council went through in determining to allocate £30K to help support the continued opening of Highworth Leisure Centre.
- The support offered to other community leisure centres across Swindon that also require extra funding to remain open due to Covid restrictions.

Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for Town Centre, Culture and Heritage), responded to the questions at the meeting.

24. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 21st October 2020.

Minute 25. Budget Management Update (October)

Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills) advised the Committee that the Council has received an additional £3.6m from central government under the lost income scheme since the meeting of Cabinet, which is on top of the grants already received.

Councillor Holland and Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults and Health) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Paul Dixon and the Chair on the following matters:

- James Robbins (Chair), Steve Weisinger (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Emma Bushell, Matthew Courtliff, Paul Dixon, Jane Milner-Barry, Barbara Parry, Kevin Parry, Roger Smith, Andy Spry and Timothy SwinyardThe amount of consideration given so far as to what would happen should Swindon be moved to a higher Covid tier, such as calculating the required extra funding and support that would be needed.
- The budget implications for Swindon as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review being for one year.
- The opportunities to extend the provision of free school meals over the forthcoming half term and Christmas breaks using the funding received over the summer from Government, and other plans for supporting vulnerable children during those times.
- The communication planned to advise eligible families of the help and support available to them.
- The funding of the provision of food to those 'shielding' and to those unable to afford to pay for food, the details of which are contained within a Cabinet Member Briefing Note which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 25 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 26. Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan

Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell and Paul Dixon on the following matters:

- The re-categorisation of the sheltered housing stock where finances allow and any subsequent impact this may have on vulnerable members of the community.
- The guarantees in place to ensure that any contracts being entered in to by the capital repairs team with external companies are obtaining best value when compared to what might be directly delivered by the Council.
- The balance between the use of in-house teams (used to fill gaps where there is not much demand in the market) and the use of external companies (awarded contracts via the usual procurement processes) which gives an element of flexibility in responding to issues.
- The adherence to the Decent Homes Standard as a minimum, with additional repair work undertaken on a yearly basis prioritised by need, and how this helps address the cost implications from consequential repairs given the current £81m budget shortfall.

Resolved – That Minute 26 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 27. Annual Review of Local Ombudsman Complaints

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council) referred to the continued improvement year on year in the Council's performance as identified in the report. Councillor Renard drew attention to the measures being adopted whereby the Corporate Management Team will have key complaints escalated to them for oversight and review.

Councillor Renard responded to a question put by Councillor Emma Bushell regarding the plans to address the points raised by the Ombudsman concerning remedies not completed within the timescales and where the Council did not follow the complaints procedures.

Resolved – That Minute 27 of the Cabinet be noted.

Minute 28. The Future of Swindon's Cultural Offer

Councillors Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for Town Centre, Culture and Heritage) and Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Junab Ali, Paul Dixon, Jane Milner-Barry and the Chair on the following matters:

- The plans in place to achieve the intention of Swindon being world renowned for innovation, entrepreneurialism and a great quality of life by 2026, the details of which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.
- The differences between this business case and previous unsuccessful business cases, including: programme milestones showing what will be achieved each year; the different approach to working in partnership with external organisations, and; the greater level of detail showing the positive way forward for the town over the next eight to ten years.
- The expected Government announcement on the future high street and towns fund, due in the next two to three weeks, and the positive result expected for Swindon regarding the Bus Boulevard scheme. The Committee noted that the investment prospectus will take in to account any positives or negatives that arise as a result of any grants decisions by Government.
- The creation of an Advisory Board who are regularly consulted with regarding the proposals.
- That Council funding is not being proposed for investment to this project as it would involve a certain level of commitment with no expectation of that funding being returned and with no business case having been developed.
- The plans for the areas of the town centre not included in these proposals, which are being discussed at workshops being held with developers and stakeholders and which will feed in to the local plan review.
- How any scrutiny work undertaken to look at the future of the town centre will report to the April meeting of this Committee to tie in with the Cabinet Member's Question and Answer session.
- How the extension of permitted development rights should not apply to these proposals as the plan focusses on the theatre moving to the Kimmersfield site with no expected impact on anything else currently situated there.

- How the next phase in the project will take in to account the wider benefits and advantages for Swindon in improving its cultural offer, some of which have already been identified in a previous bid for heritage lottery funding.
- The provision for community artists, community arts facilities and affordable arts spaces in the proposals for Swindon's cultural offer which will be considered at a future phase in the project.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 28 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 29. Carbon Neutral Strategy

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Climate Change) responded to a question put by Councillor Jane Milner-Barry regarding the adoption of 2050 as the target date for the reduction of carbon emissions across the whole borough as compared to the target date of 2030 as adopted for the Council (agreed via a motion put to Full Council in January 2020).

Resolved – That Minute 29 of the Cabinet be noted.

25. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of the key objectives of her role, which are to:

- Provide strategic leadership and be the statutory lead Member for Children's Services.
- Provide the political leadership for the improvement plan.
- Through the senior officers, ensure Children are Safeguarded.
- Provide political leadership for contract/compliance/procurement.
- Provide the political leadership for the strategic provision of:
 - a) Corporate Parenting
 - b) Early Help
 - c) Youth Justice
- Promote Children's Health and Wellbeing.
- To work with other Cabinet Members to Manage Demand within the portfolio.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

The Cabinet Member is responsible for securing the following Vision Pledges:

- Pledge 20: Increase the number of foster carers in Swindon so that every 'child looked after' who should be, is placed in their home borough.
- Pledge 21: Ensure that there is a partnership approach to early prevention and intervention across Swindon so that more children and families are supported early, including through the Troubled Families Programme, to prevent escalation to statutory social care.
- Pledge 22: Ensure that Swindon's vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded and protected.
- Pledge 25: Work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure the level of children in Swindon with excess weight is no higher than the England average.

The Cabinet Member also has delegated responsibility for:

- Children and Family Services including Early Help, Youth Offending Team, Young Person Substance Misuse team, Targeted Mental Health, Education Welfare, Educational Psychology, Youth Engagement, Services for Disabled Children.
- Children's Social Work services.
- Community Health Services including Health Visitors, School Nurses and Family Nurse Partnership, Paediatric Therapy Services, Speech and Language and Portage.
- Swindon Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Children Voluntary Sector Contracts.
- Fostering and adoption services.
- Troubled Families.
- SEN.
- Music Services.
- Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre.

Councillor Martin introduced her report and highlighted the following cross cutting themes:

- Multi-agency working (with health services, the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police and with schools) to apply consistent processes to keep children safe.
- The concept of whole family working, which particularly applies where supporting mental health issues.
- Youth offending and corporate parenting, which can involve children with a complex set of needs.

Councillor Martin responded to questions put by Councillors Paul Dixon, Jane Milner-Barry and the Chair on the following matters:

- The significant reduction in the number of agency social workers over the last 18 months (from around two thirds to a third) and the subsequent impact this has had on the stability of social worker placements with children.
- The expectation that parish councils will utilise existing resources in becoming involved with the new multi-agency place based working model.
- The long waiting times for the diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder, ADHD and mental health services in Swindon, and the steps being taken to help with this such as the additional support professional appointed to assist families. The presentation on how this service will work will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting, along with the data on the waiting lists provided by the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- The background information relating to the increase in the number of referrals into MASH for children and young people who may be being criminally exploited in the last 12 months, the details of which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.
- The reduction in the number of children that need to be helped through statutory services, and how more support is being provided by early intervention and prevention services within communities and within a range of commissioned services being provided.
- The background information relating to the DIVERT project (a programme aimed at those young people involved in peer related criminal activity and at risk of criminal

exploitation), the details of which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

- The actual distances involved for the 27% of children looked after which have been placed more than 20 miles from home, mainly due to the placement needs of those individual children.
- How social workers have adopted alternative solutions to the Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing rules to continue to provide the same levels of help and support.
- The plans to create small family homes to be used by one or two vulnerable children who require round the clock care from social workers, and the mechanisms that will be put in place for neighbours of these properties to raise any concerns they may have. The Committee noted that the purchase of these properties will not be linked to a previous Council motion to reduce the number of empty properties across Swindon, and that the purchase and service provision will be undertaken by an external provider commissioned by the Council.
- The progress against the SEND Written Statement of Action that will shortly be considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board and can be found on the local offers page of the Council's website (the link for which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting).

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Martin 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 information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

26. Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2020/2021 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 7th July 2020, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair added an item to the Work Programme for the meeting on 7th December regarding air quality in Swindon. The item will include the existing Kings Hill air quality management plan, an indication of how air quality is looking across the whole town, and the specific issues currently being experienced in Rodbourne.

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.