

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 2021**

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

Also in attendance were: Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet), Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills), Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults and Health), Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre, Culture and Heritage), Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services), Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport & Planning) and Jenny Jefferies.

### **41. 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 Infrastructure, Transport and Planning) as an employee of a company involved with the review of the Local Plan.

### **42. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **43. Public Question Time**

There were no questions submitted under this item.

### **44. Budget Setting Process 2021-2022**

The Committee received a report from the Chief Legal Officer about the Budget setting process for 2021/22.

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

The Chair along with councillors Emma Bushell, Jim Grant and Jane Milner-Barry, raised the following issues set out below, to which Councillors Russell Holland and Brian Ford, together with Mick Bowden, Corporate Director of Finance and Assets, and David Haley, Corporate Director, Children Services, responded at the meeting.

- The 2020/21 Local Grant settlement for Swindon.

- The position of the budget following receipt of the Local Grant settlement, the details of any proposed savings planned and how Cabinet will be able to submit a balanced budget for scrutiny at the Council meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021.
- The opportunity for all councillors to provide feedback on the draft budget before its submission to the Council meeting.
- How some grants received were one-off payments for this financial year, and that this would result on budget pressures in future years.
- The effect of long-Covid on demand for services.
- The array of short- and long-term pressures on the Adult Social Care budget and Children Services.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant recovery plan and how it is to be submitted for discussion at the next Schools Forum on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021.
- How the Covid related grant was reserved for Covid related activity and reference was made to other grants received that included the new homes bonus, social care grant and a lower tier grant.
- An overview of potential risk factors and financial impact associated with the second Covid-related lockdown.
- The financial basis utilised to calculate the draft budget.
- Managing demand for older people and disability, learning disability and mental health services through robust dialogue and support provided to the service user and their carer and how community engagement would be essential.
- The methods implemented to ensure Adult Social Services aligned their programme of work to operate in a more modern, efficient and effective way.
- Confirmation that the car park financial forecast was based on pre-lockdown calculations and that the forecast did not identify specific car parks.

Resolved: – (1) That the budget position update be noted and that the Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, 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 2021/22 budget, be noted.

(2) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Assets be requested to circulate the Local Grant settlement figures.

(3) That the Corporate Director Adult Services, Health and Housing be requested to circulate:

a) Information regarding “strength based” conversations held to support service users.

b) Information regarding the methods to be used to ensure the Directorate aligned the programme of work to operate in a more modern, efficient and effective way.

(4) That the Clerk be requested to circulate Schools Forum minutes to the meeting being held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

#### **45. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning**

Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport & Planning) was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of the key objectives of his role, which are to:

- Have overview of the Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Planning Framework.
- Provide political leadership for the New Eastern Villages programme.

- Have overview of the Wichelstowe Joint Venture.
- Set the direction for future strategic infrastructure programmes to support economic growth including housing and transport.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

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

- Pledge 3: Refresh and implement the Masterplan for Swindon Town Centre, supporting our vision that Swindon is a vibrant, modern place.
- Pledge 6
  - Deliver infrastructure in a timely way to assist in phased housing & employment delivery for the New Eastern Villages including White Hart Junction & 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 brownfield 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.

The Cabinet Member also has delegated responsibility for:

- Traffic and Transport Forward Planning (including Local Transport Plan and Implementation of Local Transport Plan).
- Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability.
- Building Control and Local Land Charges.
- Housing Strategy.
- Design-based consultancy.
- Wichelstowe (Commercialisation).
- Strategic flood and water management.
- Street Naming.
- Environmental Issues Landscape & Countryside.
- Highways Strategy.
- Local Plan – oversight and assurance around delivery of housing numbers, employment land, planning policy.
- Strategic Infrastructure Plan.
- Developer Contributions.
- Transport Schemes – Delivery of existing schemes & determination of future schemes.
- Bus & Rail network – Network Rail & GWR – Swindon Station.

Councillor Sumner introduced his report and referred to the delivery of the infrastructure programmes across Swindon, particularly at Wichelstowe and the on-going construction development at Symmetry Park that will provide significant employment opportunities.

Councillor Sumner responded to questions put by Councillors Junab Ali, Jim Grant, Jane Milner-Barry, Steve Weisinger and the Chair on the following matters:

- The proposed timescale for the completion of the 3 and 5 year housing supply targets set in the Neighbourhood Plans and the progress made to date.
- The progress made on the number of houses completed in the Eastern Village sector.
- Adverse effects of Covid on new housing delivery.
- The report published on the Planning Resource website regarding Swindon's position in meeting the government housing requirements and confirmation that currently no government interventions have been proposed.
- The Council's performance in meeting current housing delivery targets.
- The promotion of Swindon as an ideal town for housing developers, how the number of planned houses currently surpasses the number of houses already built and that construction delays sometimes resulted from the need to lay in the services infrastructure prior to commencing any housing developments.
- An explanation that whilst work was being undertaken by the Planning Department to ensure that the Local Plan met the achievable and deliverable targets, it was beyond its control if developers opted to "park the land" until what they deemed 'the right financial climate to build houses.'
- The myriad approaches used to engage with local business, landowners and commercial agents to promote town centre regeneration by utilising achievable solutions that will lead to a wider sustainable regeneration.
- How the Town Centre Master Plan, which was originally drafted in 2009, was continuously updated to include a) recommendations made by local businesses and b) take into consideration on-going concerns arising over time, such as the latest Covid-19 pandemic.
- How an on-line interactive tool was being developed, as part of the revamped Town Centre Master Plan, enabling the public to stay abreast of the latest developments on the town centre regeneration.
- Planning tools and drivers put in place to encourage stronger engagement with absent landlords of town centre properties.
- How delays in the completion of infrastructure schemes being undertaken at Meads Way and the Moonraker Junction was due to essential work being undertaken by utilities and the adverse effect the pandemic has had on manpower.
- An explanation of the challenges being met by the Strategic Development Department including financial elements and how its restructuring has resulted in efficiencies and savings.
- The range of topics raised in the department's response to the White Paper included developers concerns regarding planning permissions and community engagement and that this information had been circulated to members in an all members briefing note.
- The robust discussions held by the Climate Change working group included understanding factors that best promote sustainable construction practices and energy efficiencies that are being used within the modern construction industry.

- How through partnership working, developers ensured building projects were financially viable and that the local authority ensured good quality developments are built, which encompassed a number of affordable housing within each development.
- That a mechanism was in place allowing for the recoupment of infrastructure costs invested as part of joint ventures between the local authority and developers and confirmation that these costs are being recouped over the period of the project.
- The successful construction of electric car charging points at Wichelstowe.

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 the Strategic Planning Policy Manager be requested to circulate information regarding:

a) The number of houses completed since the current Local Plan was adopted and whether the Council is on target to complete the anticipated 22 thousand houses within the plan.

b) The scheduled end date for the infrastructure schemes being undertaken at Meads Way and the Moonraker Junction.

3) That the Head of Finance, Economy, Regeneration and Skills, be requested to circulate information regarding the timescale to recoup infrastructure costs from the developers at Wichelstowe.

#### **46. 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 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

#### **47. 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.