

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2021

PRESENT:- Councillors James Robbins (Chair), Steve Weisinger (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Matthew Courtliff, Jim Grant, Jane Milner-Barry, Barbara Parry, Kevin Parry, Kevin Small, 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), Robert Jandy (Cabinet Member for Operational 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 & Planning), Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Climate Change), Oliver Donachie, Jenny Jefferies and Vinay Manro.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Emma Bushell.

48. 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 Kevin Parry made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Progress towards the Council's Vision, Priorities and Pledges) as he is employed by Honda.

49. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

50. Public Question Time

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon Wick resident, had submitted a question prior to the meeting relating to the closure of the Oasis being reviewed by two different Committees and a Cabinet Member Advisory Group (CMAG), and which queried the openness of information, the roadmap and the timescales involved amongst the three.

The Chair responded to the question at the meeting.

Mr Worman asked a number of supplementary questions at the meeting regarding:

- Minutes of the CMAG meetings not being publically available due to the confidential nature of the discussions held.
- Whether any of the £5m amendment to the Capital Programme as referred to at the last Cabinet meeting (which is being made available for leisure) will be spent on the Oasis.

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, and Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills), responded at the meeting.

51. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 3rd February 2021.

Item Number 44. Budget Management Update (February)/Draft Budget 2021/22

Councillors Renard and Holland responded to questions put by Councillors Oliver Donachie and Kevin Small on the following matters:

- The wording of the Minute for Confirmation from Cabinet to Council regarding the Budget and the perceived lack of opportunity this presents to members to discuss any details in depth, though the option for members to pass amendments or proposals to the budget will still be available in the usual manner.
- Whether non-specific savings identified in the report will be achieved and the £1.5m contingency fund will therefore not be used.
- The expected funding gap between what is being used as one-off money to support ongoing expenditure in 2021/2022 that will have to be found again as new in 2022/2023, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- Whether all political parties represented on the Council had been consulted on the budget proposals.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 44 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.

Item Number 45. Capital Programme to 2025/26

Councillors Renard, Holland and Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre, Culture and Heritage) responded to questions put by Councillors Oliver Donachie, Jim Grant, Vinay Manro and Kevin Small on the following matters:

- The Council Motion which tasked the Leader to ensure that the lease holder protects the Oasis building from criminal activity and is properly maintained, and the reports that the building is not being maintained and how likely that is to prejudice a future business case.
- The anticipated resolution on the Oasis between GLL and Seven Capital and the options available to the Council should that not prove possible.
- The likelihood of the Oasis continuing to be run as a not for profit amenity within any future business case, and of other GLL-run sites across Swindon not re-opening following the pandemic.
- The option of publically subsidising the Oasis as a budget proposal.
- Which facilities that GLL operate on behalf of the Council are subsidised, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The interest repayments on the £5m approved borrowing for leisure facility, expected to be in the region of between £250k and £300k, and how these will be funded either by development or potential revenue.

- How the original plans for Oasis and North Star pre-supposed that development would take place as part of the wider commercial arrangements, with the administration being open-minded to the variation of the original proposals for the North Star site.
- The purpose behind the amendment to the capital programme being to see if the parameters of what is possible can be stretched, and to open up avenues of discussion and focus that may not have been available otherwise. The Committee noted that the amendment does not specifically mention the Oasis because it is anticipated that GLL and Seven Capital will resolve any issues.
- That the figure of £5m has been based on the knowledge of operating costs from when Oasis was under the Council's control, but it is speculation.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 45 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.

Item Number 46. Treasury management strategy statement 2021/22

Resolved – That Minute 46 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 47. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) - Rents and Charges 2021/22

Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) gave a brief update on the timetable for the options appraisal process on Milverton and Torrington as follows:

- Consultation with Ward Members on possible options should take place in June or July 2021.
- Design work to support public consultations should be carried out in August and September 2021.
- Public consultations and consultations with residents (subject to any pandemic restrictions) should take place in September and October 2021.
- Scheme proposals should be put forward as part of the HRA budget for 2022/23 from November 2021 onwards.
- The initial options report focussed on the refurbishment of the existing scheme and layout, with preliminary sketches of what new build options could offer. In the light of various recommendations post-Grenfell, it is become increasingly important to revisit that initial work to make sure the best solution for tenants is delivered.

Resolved – That Minute 47 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 48. Pay Policy Statement: April 2021 (Minute for Confirmation)

Resolved – That Minute 48 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 49. Introduction of a Permit Scheme for Roadworks

Resolved – That Minute 49 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 50. School Admission Arrangements and Home to School Transport Policies 2022-23

Resolved – That Minute 50 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 51. Carbon Reduction Strategy

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Climate Change) responded to a question put by Councillor Jane Milner-Barry on whether the target of a 68% reduction in emissions for the whole of the UK should still be included as a target in the Council's Strategy, even though its achievement will be subject to receiving funding from Government.

Resolved – That Minute 51 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 52. Apprenticeships

Councillor Holland wished to record his thanks for the work done by Councillors Barbara Parry and Kevin Parry in their roles as Chairs of the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee respectively.

Councillor Barbara Parry asked the Cabinet Member to note that she had attended an apprenticeship session that day led by the Borough Council, and it had become apparent that some apprentices felt they would have benefited from more support in terms of a transition from school to a workplace. Councillor Parry suggested that workshops could be introduced to better prepare them.

The Chair thanked officers for the support given to care leavers entering apprenticeships.

Resolved – That Minute 52 of the Cabinet be noted.

Item Number 53. Proposed Transfer of land for Residential Development Proposal

Councillor Holland responded to a question put by Councillor Jim Grant on the number of affordable houses included in the development of the former Stratton Education Centre site by The Swindon Housing Development Company Ltd, which has been limited due to the intention to preserve the school building.

Resolved – That Minute 53 of the Cabinet be noted.

52. Progress towards the Council's Vision, Priorities and Pledges

Councillor Renard presented to the Committee a report which provided details of the progress being made towards the Council's Vision, Priorities and Pledges.

Councillor Renard introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Vision, Priorities and Pledges were first approved by Council in 2015, and took a view on what the Council should achieve by 2030 in terms of day-to-day services, improving standards, and improving the performance of the Council.

- The Vision, Priorities and Pledges have been through one revision around two years ago, and it is proposed that they be refreshed again in summer / autumn 2021 to review if they need refocussing.

Councillors Renard, Heenan, Holland, Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport & Planning) and Williams responded to questions put by Councillors Junab Ali, Oliver Donachie, Jim Grant, Jenny Jefferies, Jane Milner-Barry, Kevin Small and the Chair on the following matters:

- That the link in the report to the Council Plan on the website shows an out-of-date document, which officers are aware of and plan to update shortly.
- How the rollout of the second tranche of the Emergency Active Travel Fund from Central Government will improve the walking and cycling routes in central Swindon.
- The upgrade works being done with CityFibre and OpenReach to deliver ultrafast broadband in Swindon, and other work being undertaken to cover the 'notspots' in Swindon.
- Plans that are progressing in terms of assuring the future of the Honda site.
- The Government's Honda Task Force, which is still meeting regularly, and the work being done by the five sub-groups under it.
- The detrimental impact of Covid-19 on the leisure industry, and the perceived lack of private sector appetite for investing in leisure destinations at this time.
- The future of the Oasis being a matter for Seven Capital, which has a development agreement and planning approval in place, and it being up to them to come forward with relevant funding as and when the market allows them to do so.
- How GLL currently has the lease for the Oasis and has a responsibility for maintaining it, but that if and when the lease goes back to Seven Capital, Seven will then take on that responsibility.
- The current education outcomes in Swindon (as published by the Department for Education) and the work being done to improve the education and attainment of children within the Borough.
- The report which had incorrectly identified Swindon as having one of the most unhealthy town centres in the country.
- The projects currently being delivered upon such as the housing development in Wichelstowe, the Zurich building being built, and the £400m warehouse distribution centre at Symmetry Park.
- The loss of senior officers at the Council and how this will affect the functioning of the Council going forward, particularly given the ongoing concerns over the impact of Covid-19 on services and staff.
- The recent Ofsted inspection in Children's Services, which focussed specifically on the Council's response to Covid-19 over the last twelve months, and had praised what the Council has done.

Resolved – That the contents of the report be noted.

53. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services

Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste 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 the strategic direction for the Council's StreetSmart, rubbish collection, and recycling services.
- Set the priorities for the maintenance of the highways network.
- To provide overall political leadership for the Demand Management 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 3: Delivering improvements to the strategic town centre transport network.
- Pledge 5: Enhance Wellington Street as a prime thoroughfare for the town.
- Pledge 13: Find new ways to engage communities and neighbourhoods to increase the cleanliness of their local areas.

The Cabinet Member also has delegated responsibility for:

- Strategic Highways & Maintenance Works.
- Car Parks and Bus Gates.
- Building community capacity.
- Public Transport (including Concessionary Fares, Specialist Transport, Council Transport and Fleet Management).
- Political oversight of Waterside Depot, including Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Recycling and Refuse Collection – Domestic & Trade.
- Waste Disposal / Waste Minimisation.
- Street Lighting [maintenance and strategic].
- Street Cleaning including removal of graffiti and abandoned vehicles.
- StreetSmart.
- Public Toilets.
- Ground & Tree Maintenance and open spaces.
- Parks (StreetSmart services only).
- Playgrounds, including those that are not presently utilised.
- Maintenance of Roundabouts and non-HRA verges.
- Building Services, cleaning, catering & security services.
- Gullies and drainage, minor road repairs, potholes.
- Repair and Improvements to Council Housing Stock.
- Enforcement.

Councillor Penny introduced her report and highlighted the following points:

- That the portfolio had been recalibrated in May 2020 following the dismantling of the former Communities and Housing Directorate and the introduction of a specific operations function.
- The recalibration separated out the strategic element of the former Communities and Housing Directorate and put responsibility for strategy, operations and performance in different portfolios.
- The Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence has responsibility for parking charges policy. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change has responsibility for waste strategy. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety has responsibility for policy and strategy relating to housing matters. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services now presides over the operational elements of housing, highways, parking and waste.

Councillor Penny responded to questions put by Councillors Matthew Courtliff, Oliver Donachie, Jane Milner-Barry, Kevin Small, Timothy Swinyard, Steve Weisinger and the Chair on the following matters:

- The focus for the new Director of Operations on improving the facilities and working conditions at Waterside, which will include around £150k investment.
- The reasons behind the improvements in performance in highways maintenance, recycling and refuse collections, and repairs and improvements to housing stock, which included:
 - There is more structure around the management of operations.
 - Performance is reviewed on a daily basis.
 - Managers are held to account for their actions, failures are reviewed, lessons are learnt and corrective action is taken.
 - Greater focus on the customer by paying attention to complaints and driving up efficiency.
- The AA report which had incorrectly identified Swindon as one of the worst performing Councils in the country on pothole repairs due to the following matters:
 - The report was about the length of road works that needs to happen in any particular area and the data considered only a snapshot of a couple of years.
 - Investment in the highway network needs to be looked at over a much longer timeframe to get an accurate picture.
 - The data considered were for carriageway major maintenance only and so gave a limited picture of the highways assets that the Council maintains.
 - Over the last few years, the Council has consistently invested more on capital maintenance of highway assets than the capital grant available from Central Government and has prioritised this spend annually through its Local Transport Implementation Plan.
- Confirmation on the percentage rate of pothole repairs within the Borough, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The delays to the Mead Way roadworks, which had mainly been caused by the inability of utility companies to go on site due to Covid-19, and the new expected completion date of June 2021.
- An update on the rollout of food waste collection across the Borough which included:
 - That an end to end waste review has been completed.
 - The objective is to fund food waste within current costs incurred.
 - There are two available options that may allow this by collections being done in a different way.
 - The two options will be reviewed, sign off will be sought, and then officers will look to purchase vehicles during the first quarter of 2022.
- That contractors are scheduled to erect new signage at the Mannington roundabout on 8th March 2021.
- The projected savings required to fund the rollout of food waste collections across the Borough which includes £300k already identified in the 2021/22 budget, as well as a further £800k to £1m that will be found through:
 - A review of the end to end food waste trial.
 - A change to the way some of the recyclates are collected.
 - Public Power Solutions are looking at efficiencies to help in the reduction of costs for waste collection.

- The waste collection review has identified that waste could be collected using less vehicles and people, with efficiencies to be found in kerbside collections.
- A reduction in back office costs.
- A reduction in the costs of some contracts.
- The reasons behind the non-delivery of £222k savings from the waste collection service for 2020/21 due to the way staff had to be organised because of Covid-19 measures, and the twenty to thirty smaller projects that were not delivered also as a result of Covid-19.
- Confirmation on when Whitehill Way in west Swindon is due for resurface and repair work, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- A portion of the new highway asset management system has gone live following funding being received from the Local Enterprise Partnership. The new system will significantly improve the management of highways data, highway inspections, works ordering and workforce operations.
- The impact of the closure of the local tarmac plant in Swindon on the ability of the Council to repair potholes.
- How the rollout of the food waste collection across the Borough should improve the Council's recycling rate by up to at least 50%, with the remaining 10% being found through changes to what the public can recycle, with the expected 60% target being hit by 2030.
- The reasons for Akcess dial-a-ride vehicles being parked on the public highway, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Penny 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.

54. Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Scrutiny Officer which set 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.

The Chair referred to the scope for a Task Group on the Oasis closure and potential reopening that was included at Appendix 1 to the report, and requested that members consider its addition to the Work Programme for the current Municipal Year. Following a vote, the Task Group was added to the Work Programme for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.

55. 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.