

Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 20 July 2015

Additional Information

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5 – CONSIDERATION OF CABINET DECISIONS

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NOTICE OF DRAFT DECISIONS OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH JULY 2015

15. Future Special Educational Needs Provision in Swindon

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Board Director, Commissioning submitted a joint report concerning (a) research findings into the demand for specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in Swindon, (b) feedback received from stakeholders and workshops in developing options for the future delivery of Special Educational Needs provision, (c) a proposed strategy and actions to establish a sustainable level of specialist provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability in Swindon, and (d) a proposal to remove the requirement for the establishment of a new 70 place 11 to 25 years Special School for September 2016 from the Education Capital Programme.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, introduced the joint report and advised that she believed that the discussions that had taken place at the "Open Forum" held immediately before the Cabinet meeting had highlighted to Cabinet Members both the reasons for the proposals set out within the report, and the issues associated with the implementation of the proposed strategy and actions.

Resolved – (1) That the report and research findings on the Future Special Educational Needs Provision in Swindon, as set out at Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.16 of the joint report, be noted.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning be authorised to:

(a) Develop further the strategy and action plan in relation to children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in relation to the priorities set out in paragraph 3.25 of the joint report;

(b) Remove the proposed requirement for a new 70 place 11 to 25 years Special School from the Education Capital Programme for September 2016.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

16. Budget Management 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Position

The Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance and the Board Director, Resources submitted a joint report setting out (a) the current forecast out-turn position of the Council's Revenue Budget as at the end of May 2015, (b) issues affecting the Council's finances, (c) proposed virements, (d) proposed new Zoo and Taxi Licensing fees, (e) financial support for Old Town Christmas Lights, (f) the current forecast out-turn position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account and Dedicated Schools Grant 2015/16, (g) the Council's Medium Term Financial Position, (h) proposed strategies to respond to the likely Medium Term Financial Position, (i) Proposed Budget Planning approaches, (j) the optimising use of resources, (k) the operation of the Council's Change Programmes, (l) Town Centre Regeneration, (m) Civic Campus Alterations, and (n) the implications for the Council of the Government's Budget Announcement on 8th July 2015.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, introduced the joint report and drew specific attention to the proposed increase in some licence fees and to the proposals to support Christmas lights for Old Town, additional funding to support economic development and to enable changes to be made to the Council's "one stop shop" and the Civic Campus. He referred to the necessity for officers to continue to work on the Medium Term Financial Strategy to support the Council's future aspirations and to help it to meet the financial challenges it faced.

Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care, and an Old Town Ward Councillor, welcomed the proposal for Old Town Christmas Lights. He believed this provided a good example of the business community, the Old Town Traders Association, residents, local councillors and the Council working together to use existing Planning Obligation Section 106 funding, allocated for Arts and Culture, to benefit the local community and the local economy. He added that the lights would not only help connect Old Town and Swindon Town Centre at Christmas time, but also provide the opportunity for a community event around the "switch-on" that would be welcomed by Swindon residents and the business community.

The Board Director, Resources, provided an update on the Government's Budget Statement of 8th July 2015. The Government had announced no additional in-year changes likely to impact on the Council apart from the reductions in Public Health funding that had already been announced and reference included in the joint report. However, it was possible that more detailed proposals effecting local government would be included within the forthcoming autumn statement. He advised that the announcement of a national minimum living wage might put pressure on the Council's finances, particularly by way of the costs of commissioning care agencies. There would also be a need for consultation to take place about possible changes to the Housing Revenue Account and its capital programmes given the effects on funding of the proposed year on year rent reductions announced in the Budget.

Resolved – (1) That the Cabinet notes the projected Revenue Budget Out-turn position for 2015/16, as set out in Table 1 and Appendices 1 and 2 to the joint report.

(2) That the proposed Budget virements, as set out in Appendix 1 to the joint report, be approved.

(3) That the proposed Zoo Licensing fee structure, as set out in Appendix 4 to the joint report, be approved.

(4) That, subject to consultation, the proposed changes to Taxi Licence fees, as set out in Appendix 5 to the joint report, be approved.

(5) That the Board Director Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, be authorised to release up to £50,000 of Planning Agreement Section 106 funds to the Old Town Business Association to replace and enhance Christmas lights in Old Town and on Victoria Hill, Swindon, via either outright purchase or a rental agreement, subject to the receipt of three quotations and confirmation that there will be no on-going cost implication for the Council.

(6) That the latest predicted future funding situation for the Council, subject to clarification of the detail of the Government's Budget announcement on 8th July 2015, be noted, and Council officers be authorised to continue work to implement

the Medium Term Financial Strategy as outlined in Section 10 of the joint report.

(7) That recognising the important link between Swindon's continuing economic growth and the Council's financial position, an allocation of £60,000 from the Regeneration Reserve be approved as the Council's contribution to the cost of engaging external expertise to help develop a detailed Delivery Plan to secure further significant regeneration in the Swindon Town Centre in the medium term.

(8) That the results of the Swindon Town Centre Regeneration review, as referred to in (7) above, and the proposed Delivery Plan be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration in the Autumn 2015.

(9) That an indicative sum of £50,000 be allocated to allow work to be commissioned on improvements to the Customer Services One Stop Shop and the creation of additional office space on the Civic Campus, recognising that an up to date costing for the work will be submitted to the Cabinet on 9th September 2015.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

17. Education Transport Policy 2016/17

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Board Director, Commissioning submitted a joint report concerning the outcome of consultation undertaken on the Council's proposed Education Transport Policy for 2016/17, and detailing (a) proposed changes in arrangements and to the appeals system to be adopted, and (b) proposed pilot projects in relation to Special Educational Needs transport and personalised travel budgets.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, referred to the contents of the joint report and explained that the policy was submitted annually to the Cabinet and was similar to that presented in previous years. She referred to the two changes for 2016/17, specifically an alteration to the appeals hearing process and the proposed introduction of pilot schemes for Special Education Needs personalised travel budgets.

Resolved – (1) That, having regard to the responses to the consultation responses, as set out in Appendix 2, the Council's Education Transport Policy for 2016/17, as attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report, be approved.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning be authorised to implement the Education Transport Policy 2016/17.

(3) That the Board Director, Commissioning be authorised to conduct pilot schemes in relation to Special Education Needs personalised travel budgets to identify future efficiency savings, as referred to in Section 4 of the joint report, and to report back on the outcome of the pilots by no later than the Cabinet meeting in July 2016.

(4) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services be authorised to update the terms of reference of the Education Transport Appeals Sub-Committee to reflect the proposed changes to the appeals procedure referred to in the joint report and Education Transport Policy 2016/17, and to make any required changes to the Council's Constitution to reflect this.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

18. A Consultation about Short Breaks for Disabled Children, Young People and their Families

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Head of Children, Families and Community Health submitted a joint report concerning a proposal to undertake consultation on possible changes to the Aiming High Short Breaks Service from April 2016 to refocus the service on those children and young people with disabilities who were most in need of support, and to maintain high quality short breaks support that was affordable to the Council and could be responsive to the continuing growth in demand for short breaks support.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, introduced the joint report and emphasised that the aim was not to reduce funding for this important service, but to ensure that it was focused on those in most need. She advised that it was with reluctance that it was proposed to introduce a charge for the service, but this was believed necessary and any surplus income would be re-invested in the short breaks service. She expressed her thanks to Mr Mark Green, Service Manager, Integrated Service for Disabled Children, and his team for the service they provided and for the comprehensive report that had been prepared.

Resolved – (1) That the approach set out in the joint report to refocus the short break services for children and young people with disabilities to ensure Council resources are supporting those children and families most in need, be noted and endorsed.

(2) That it be noted that the proposed revised approach to be consulted upon is not to achieve a reduction in funding, but to enable the service to effectively manage demand from 2016/17 onwards within existing resource provision.

(3) That the Head of Children, Families and Community Health be authorised to undertake a public consultation on a series of proposed changes to short break services for implementation from 1st April 2016 as follows:

(a) A new Short Breaks Criteria offering a needs-based response for children and young people with disabilities and their families. This to apply to new applicants only.

(b) A new Short Breaks 'Offer' whereby children and young people who meet the criteria receive up to a maximum of 80 hours support per year. This to apply to new applicants only.

(c) An increase in the price that families pay for the Aiming High Short Break services, from £1 to £2.50 per hour. This to become a charge, rather than a contribution. The price increase to apply to all users of the service, existing and new. Exemptions to be applied for families in receipt of certain income related benefits. Any future changes to the national welfare benefit system would also be taken into account.

(d) A reduction in Aiming High's specialist holiday groups from nine weeks to seven weeks per year alongside some other specific changes in order to standardise the service offered across groups. This to apply to all users of the service, existing and new.

(e) Moving the Aiming High Newsletter to electronic circulation only (cease printing paper copies).

(f) A new 'Short Breaks Statement' to be implemented from 2016/17, reflecting the above changes.

(4) That it be noted that the consultation process will run for two months, from 1st August until 30th September 2015, with the findings to be presented to the Cabinet as soon as practicable thereafter.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

19. Pest Control Services

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety and the Director of Public Health submitted a joint report concerning the outcome of consultation on a proposal to discontinue the Council's 'In-House' Pest Control Service from the 1st September 2015 in view of the range of alternative commercial providers of pest control services able to deliver quality services to Swindon residents and businesses, and whilst retaining the ability to continue to support the provision of pest control services for those households considered least able to afford the cost of necessary treatments.

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, introduced the joint report and advised that as a result of better commercial provision for pest control services and a decline in the number of people using the Council's "in-house" provision it had been decided to change the way that the Council responded to pest control issues. She referred to the changes and explained that the Council would retain a means-tested concessionary price service to support those households that were most vulnerable, as well as providing suggested commercial providers through the "Buy With Confidence" list maintained by the Council's Trading Standards team.

Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, commented that initially he had held concerns regarding the proposals, particularly in terms of the possible consequences for the Borough's public areas, and for the effect on those on limited means who might be denied a service. However, as a result of the detail contained within the report and his conversations with Councillor Faramarzi, he was now confident that his fears had been allayed and he fully supported the report's proposals.

Councillor Faramarzi advised that she proposed to introduce an amendment to the report's recommendations to remove a reference to tendering.

Resolved – (1) That, having regard to the outcome of the consultation carried out, the Director of Public Health be authorised to stop the Council's current 'In-House' Pest Control Service as from the 1st September 2015.

(2) That the Director of Public Health be authorised to ensure that:

(a) Swindon residents and businesses have the option of access to a Council endorsed, competitive and effective pest control service in place of the current 'In-House' provision.

(b) The Council continues providing existing concessions to those residents least able to afford the cost of pest control treatments and to provide the necessary level of subsidy.

(c) The continued funding of pest treatments deemed to be necessary in the public interest, on grounds of safety, primarily, but not exclusively on Council owned-land.

(3) That the Public Protection Manager be authorised to implement from the 1st September 2015 the agreed new arrangements for the Pest Control Services, including identifying an alternative provider of concessionary and public interest pest control treatments.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

20. Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations on Councillors' Allowances for 2016/17 (Minute for Confirmation)

The Leader of the Council and the Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a joint report setting out recommendations arising from a meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances.

The Chair expressed his thanks to the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work and commitment in undertaking a review and referred to the comparative data it had collected. He reminded colleagues that the Cabinet and Council were required to consider recommendations arising from a meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances. He highlighted the key recommendation of the Panel.

Resolved – (1) That the Council be requested to consider and determine the recommendations arising from the meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances held on 12th June 2015, as set out in bold text in Appendix 1 to the joint report.

(2) That it be noted that the proposal of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances is that -

(a) the level of Councillors' Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances for 2016/17 be indexed linked to the percentage increase in pay awarded to local authority staff nationally in the 2016/17 Pay Round, it being recognised that this is still to be agreed, and that this be on the basis of the percentage of the increase in the Council's pay to meet the cost.

(b) at the meeting of the Council on 23rd July 2015, the Panel wishes Councillors to be informed:

(i) of the research that the Panel has conducted to reach this recommendation; and

(ii) it is the Panel's intention to undertake an extensive review of all Councillors allowances during the current Municipal Year, with interviews and additional data to inform a more comprehensive set of recommendations to the Council for 2017/18.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

Date of Publication of Draft Decisions: 16th July 2015
Issued to Members of the Scrutiny Committee: 17th July 2015