

Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 14 December 2015

Additional Information

Agenda Item 5 – Draft Cabinet Minutes – 9th December 2015

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CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors David Renard (Chair), Brian Mattock (Vice-Chair), Toby Elliott, Emma Faramarzi, Fionuala Foley, Brian Ford, Dale Heenan, Russell Holland, Mary Martin and Garry Perkins

Councillor Emma Bushell attended the meeting in respect of Minute 50. Councillor Paul Dixon attended the meeting in respect of Minute 48. Councillor Jim Grant attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 44 and 45. Councillor Stan Pajak attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 44 and 45. Councillor Carol Shelley attended the meeting in respect of Minute 45.

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.

42. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

43. Public Question Time

The following questions were asked in accordance with Standing Order 28 –

Questioner

Mr Stephen Thompson, Swindon.

Question

The Chair advised that Mr Thompson had submitted in advance of the meeting a public question concerning Agenda Item 6, (2016-2020 Direction of Travel, Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016/17) and asking whether the Council had commissioned an Ecosystem Service Valuation and cost-benefit analysis for Lydiard Park and whether this would be undertaken.

Response

The Chair explained that unfortunately Mr Thompson was unable to attend the Cabinet and had asked his question at the Cabinet Open Forum held immediately prior to the meeting. He advised that a written answer had been provided and circulated at the meeting.

Questioner

Mr Mike Bowden, Friends of Lydiard Park, Swindon.

Question

Mr Bowden asked questions concerning Agenda Item 6, 2016-2020 Direction of Travel, Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016/17) and whether the Council (a) was confident that the subsidy for Lydiard in 2014/15 was £458,000, and

(b) confirm the Cabinet's agreement to the notion that nothing should be done at Lydiard that causes any destruction to the historic landscape and structures within the Park which were restored in the recent restoration.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Bowden for his questions and earlier comments at the Cabinet Open Forum. He advised that a written answer had been provided and circulated at the meeting.

Mr Bowden asked supplementary questions regarding (a) the Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills response and public statements in relation to correspondence from the Friends of Lydiard Park on the future of Lydiard House and Country Park, and (b) the content of the "Expressions of Interest" document issued on the Council's behalf, and on the protection of "open access" to the Park.

The Chair and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded at the meeting.

Questioner

Mrs Jane Milner-Barry (on behalf of Mrs Shirley Burnham), Old Town, Swindon.

Question

Mrs Jane Milner-Barry (on behalf of Mrs Shirley Burnham) asked questions concerning Agenda Item 6, 2016-2020 Direction of Travel, Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016/17) and when details of its proposed 'Library Service Strategy' would be published? What were its shorter-term implications for staffing the Service? Would residents, library staff and campaigners be invited to participate in the formulation of the Strategy at an early stage?

Response

The Chair thanked Mrs Milner-Barry (on behalf of Mrs Burnham) for her questions and earlier comments at the Cabinet Open Forum. He advised that a written answer had been provided and circulated at the meeting.

Mrs Milner Barry asked supplementary questions (on behalf of Mrs Burnham) concerning, the Council's duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, and (a) how the Council would ensure that all residents across the Borough would have the same access to a quality service as those who lived near the larger newer libraries, and (b) if, as intended, parish councils or voluntary groups were to run libraries, would they legally be able to do so in their own right, or act as agents for the Borough Council?

The Chair and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded at the meeting.

Questioner

Mr Jim Boyd, Hesketh Crescent, Swindon.

Question

Mr Boyd asked a question regarding the way in which the Leader of the Council chose Councillors to serve on the Cabinet.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Boyd for his question and responded at the meeting.

Questioner

Mrs Kareen Boyd, Hesketh Crescent, Swindon.

Question

Mrs Boyd asked a question regarding previous public statements made by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services associated with the future of Children's Centres and on the Croft School development.

Response

The Chair thanked Mrs Boyd for her question. The Chair, the Director of Law and Democratic Services and Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services responded at the meeting.

44. Delivering the Vision - Growing Swindon's Economy

The Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, the Chief Executive and the Board Director, Resources submitted a joint report concerning the Council's proposed strategic approach to growing Swindon's Economy, including proposals for the Council to play an active role in the regeneration of Swindon Town Centre and in supporting existing and potential businesses as well as a number of other opportunities that had been identified to generate new sources of income, and setting out issues and proposals affecting (a) "Growing Swindon's Economy", (b) Swindon Town Centre, (c) Skills and Employability, (d) Business Support, (e) Place Marketing and Inward Investment (f) the Low Carbon Economy, (g) "Delivery" arrangements, and (h) the role of Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) and related governance arrangements.

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, introduced the report and highlighted its importance for the future of the Borough. He commented specifically on the proposals for the re-focusing of the role of Forward Swindon Limited (FSL) and the regeneration of Swindon Town Centre. He referred to the significance of this if the Council was to be successful in growing the local economy.

Councillor Jim Grant, Leader of the Opposition, referred to the lack of success of Forward Swindon Ltd. in delivering projects and whether this was likely to improve even with the additional subsidy to be provided by the Council.

Councillor Perkins commented that he had believed FSL had performed well given the extremely difficult market conditions that had existed in recent years because of the economic recession. He referred to some of the successful projects that had resulted from FSL's involvement and that were now progressing. He advised that the Council would not be subsidising FSL it would be investing in Swindon's future.

Councillor Stan Pajak, Leader of the Council's Minority Group, welcomed the report and the steps being taken to deliver the vision and grow Swindon's economy. He commented on the recognition in the report of the importance of Swindon's cultural and heritage assets and their role in growing the economy. He referred to the proposals for a post of Higher Education Development Officer and enquired whether this role would be centred on seeking a university for Swindon or on enhancing the Higher Education offer that was currently available in the Borough.

Councillor Perkins commented on the importance of the Borough's heritage and culture to building a successful local economy. He referred to the proposed new museum and art gallery for Swindon and the role to be played by the Council and its partners in achieving its development. He explained that whilst it remained the Council's desire to see a Swindon University this seemed unlikely in the short term, but that work would continue to achieve this as would the efforts to develop and grow the existing Higher Education opportunities available within Swindon.

Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, expressed her support for the report and stressed the importance of maintaining the momentum of development. She welcomed the proposed establishment of a Swindon Economy and Regeneration Board and commented on the important role it could play in delivering the growing economy, attracting other sources of funding and in monitoring and measuring performance and achievements.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, drew Members' attention to the improvements made to FSL's operation due to new senior management, and asked Cllr Perkins how the Council would monitor success and undertake performance management. Cllr Perkins confirmed that he would present a report to a future Cabinet on projects that FSL would deliver, with commitments on timescales.

Resolved – (1) That the overarching approach to growing Swindon's economy and attracting new income streams, as set out in the joint report, be approved.

(2) That the position around the Council's current Base Budget funding for Economy and Growth, as set out in Appendix 2 to the joint report, be noted, and one-off sums totalling £1.971m be released from the Regeneration Reserve, as summarised in Figure 1 to the joint report, to further stimulate Swindon's economic growth over the period to 2018.

(3) That Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) continue to exist as an arm's length company.

(4) That the remit of Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) becomes more targeted to focus on Swindon Town Centre regeneration and inward investment, as set out in Table 1 to the joint report, and that the company be given responsibility for delivering the Town Centre Masterplan, including developing and holding relationships with existing and prospective landowners, employers and developers who will play a part in achieving this purpose.

(5) That the requests for capital investment to support Swindon Town Centre regeneration be brought to Cabinet for consideration by the Cabinet Members for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills and Finance, People and Performance on a case-by-case basis, following the development by Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) of specific investment cases.

(6) That the proposed new overarching governance arrangements to support delivery of the Economic Strategy and associated activities, including the running of Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL), as set out in paragraphs 3.34 to 3.37 of the joint report, be approved.

(7) That, further to the decision in (6) above, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive with the Director of Law and Democratic Services be requested to take the necessary steps to establish a Swindon Economy and Regeneration Board as a Cabinet Member Advisory Group to the Leader of the Council.

(8) That a suite of performance measures for activities detailed in the joint report related to growing Swindon's economy and regenerating Swindon Town Centre be developed by the Head of People, Performance and Engagement in consultation with relevant officers and partners and brought to the Cabinet for consideration later in the current financial year.

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

45. 2016-2020 Direction of Travel, Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016/17

The Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance and the Board Director, Resources submitted a joint report concerning the development of a strategic and financial context to enable the Council over the next four year period to progress the delivery of the Vision for Swindon, and setting out (a) the financial context within which the Council currently operated and the likely future position, (b) the Council's intended direction of travel to achieve the delivery of its Vision, strategies, plans, priorities and corporate objectives in the medium term, (c) proposals for the Council's strategic response involving establishing more financially sustainable delivery models to enable it to deliver its Vision and essential services in the future, including in terms of (i) "Growing Swindon's Economy" and identifying new forms of funding, (ii) "Going Local", and (iii) "Building Resilience", (d) proposals to engage and consult with residents, stakeholders and service users on the proposed strategic response, (e) Budget proposals for 2016/17 as part of the Council's strategic response, (f) the current forecast out-turn position of the Council's Revenue Budget, (g) the Council's Change Programmes and their relationship to the Council's finances, (h) The Council Tax Base and Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit, (i) Council Tax, (j) the new Social Care Precept, (j) the Local Council Tax (Reduction) Scheme, (k) proposed changes to Council Fees and Charges for 2016/17, (l) One-off funding, and (m) proposed virements.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, introduced the joint report and commented on its significance for the Council's and Swindon's future direction. He referred to the financial context in which the Council operated and the proposed strategic response to ensure that the Council could continue to deliver essential services to residents and achieve its Vision. He explained that the Government had made it clear that by 2020 it anticipated that local authorities would not be receiving a Revenue Support Grant and would be expected to fund local services from Council Tax and from retained Business Rates. He commented on the level of savings that the Council would need to achieve by 2020 and to his belief that this meant that the Council and its services would be very different by that time. He outlined the proposals contained in the report that would now be the subject of consultation in the run up to the Budget

Council meeting on 25th February 2016. He emphasised that no Councillor welcomed making decisions that reduced services and imposed savings, but that difficult decisions now had to be made if the Council was to be able to continue to offer quality services to the most vulnerable and to Swindon residents. He commented on the implications of the Government's recent announcement of a "Social Care precept" for Council Tax levels. He advised that, as with the retention of Business Rates, further details of the actual implications of the announcement for Swindon were awaited. He believed that the proposed strategic response and Budget proposals for 2016/17 would strengthen the Council's ability to achieve its Vision and to deliver essential services in a sustainable way for the future.

Councillor Jim Grant, Leader of the Opposition, commented on the disquiet felt by local residents at the Council's proposals, particularly with regard to Lydiard House and Country Park and for Children's Centres. He asked for clarification on the safeguards that would exist for future public access to Lydiard Park and drew attention to previous statements made by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services regarding any future closure of Children's Centres.

The Chair and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to Councillor Grant's comments and explained that clarification of the type requested would be difficult to provide until such time that the responses to the Expressions of Interest had been received. Councillor Perkins referred to the content of a proposed amendment to the report's recommendations that he would be putting forward that would request that further reports on the Lydiard issue be submitted to the Cabinet. Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, responded to the comments concerning statements she had previously made regarding the closing of Children's Centres.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, expressed his disappointment that issues were being raised by the Leader of the Opposition that did not directly relate or were relevant to the report or that set out any alternatives to proposals for the Cabinet to consider. He asked the Chair to request the Director of Law and Democratic Services to submit a report to the Corporate Governance Review Working Group to seek clarification on the issue of Councillors speaking at meetings of which they were not a member.

Councillor Stan Pajak, Leader of the Council's Minority Group, referred to the difficult financial challenges facing local government and the difficult decisions that this Council had to make. He supported an increase in the Council Tax as proposed by the Cabinet Member and he hoped that the Council would also adopt the Social Care precept to enable the Council to access even more funding to provide support services for vulnerable people.

Councillor Holland explained that further details on the Social Care precept were awaited, as was the detail of the Local Government Finance Settlement for Swindon. The Council had an existing £3m budget gap to fill prior to the Council Budget Meeting on 25th February 2016, and he believed that there remained considerable uncertainties in the Budget Planning process that would need to be resolved before February.

Councillor Brian Mattock, Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care, referred to the financial challenges facing the Council. He commented on how the

Council had achieved a reduction of the equivalent of £100m from its Revenue Budget in the last five years. He explained how services had been reshaped in Adult Social Care and had both reduced costs and improved services to individuals. However, it was increasingly difficult to identify ways that savings and re-structuring of services could take place without affecting service users and / or residents. He believed the proposals within the report offered a way forward, although he recognised that there were difficult decisions for Members to take.

Councillor Carol Shelley, Opposition Spokesperson for Children's Services, drew attention to the service provided by Children's Centres and the importance of this service for families in some of Swindon's most deprived areas. She believed that the new structure of Children's Centre should be given a longer timeframe to deliver the improvements that were desired. She referred to previous statements made by Councillor Foley regarding the future of Children's Centres and wondered why views had changed.

Councillor Foley explained the changes in circumstances, financial pressures and service performance that had resulted in her supporting the proposals within the report. She highlighted the early years' and specialist services that would still be available to all families across the Borough including the most vulnerable, should the proposal be accepted.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, highlighted the scale of the financial challenges that the Council faced over the next few years. Councillor Heenan asked Councillor Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, to clarify the process surrounding a decision on Lydiard Park and referred to the amendment that Councillor Perkins had tabled. He noted that a budget gap remained and that details of the Local Government Finance Settlement were still awaited. He asked whether consultation would subsequently take place on proposals to balance any remaining Budget gap prior to the February Council meeting.

Councillor Holland referred to the consultation process that would now begin should the Council support the report's recommendations. He would ensure and that if proposals arose to meet any Budget gap that required consultation to take place this would occur prior to the Council meeting. He asked Cabinet colleagues to endorse the report and support its recommendations.

Resolved – (1) That the medium term context of the Council be noted and the contents of this joint report be used to engage and consult with residents, stakeholders and service users on the organisational strategic response.

(2) That it be noted that engagement has started with communities and existing parish and town councils on future operating models for community assets (including Libraries) and cleaning and grounds maintenance services within a financial framing of needing to reduce Council expenditure on these services by an estimated £6m by 2020, as set out in Table Two of the joint report.

(3) That officers be authorised to continue to engage and consult where appropriate on more financially sustainable delivery models including specifically:

(a) The introduction of more commercial approaches including consideration of car parking charges at cultural assets and all country parks;

(b) That further reports be brought to the Cabinet in February 2016, setting out progress towards achieving a sustainable future for Lydiard House and Park, and in April or June 2016 to determine the future model for the site's on-going operation and that the Board Director, Service Delivery in consultation with the

Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, the Board Director, Resources and the Head of Property Assets being authorised to request the submission of formal tenders from organisations that will help secure the overall objective of finding an acceptable, sustainable future for Lydiard House and Park within the Council's ownership while reducing the annual cost to the Council Tax Payer by at least £450,000;

(c) The development of specific Community Based Asset co-location proposals for implementation in 2016/17 for a range of local services, including Libraries in six pilot areas, as detailed in paragraph 3.24 of the joint report, which will inform options through this approach to save at least £200,000 in 2016/17 across the Borough;

(d) The development of a service strategy for the Library Service for consideration by Cabinet in February 2016 to achieve a reduction in the budget for that service of at least £1.5m by 2020; and

(e) A change to the provision of the Children's Centre service offer by initially decommissioning all existing Children's Centres, utilising the buildings for child care and wider community-based services and creating a new family support service to achieve a reduction in the budget for this service of £600,000.

(4) That the Board Director, Resources be authorised to agree the transfer of small land parcels with a de minimus value associated with service transfers to existing parish and town councils in consultation with ward members, and the Director of Law and Democratic Services be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning and the Board Director, Resources, to complete any necessary documentation to effect such transfers on such terms as he considers necessary to protect the Council's interests.

(5) That the Board Director, Service Delivery, be authorised in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, the Director of Law and Democratic Services and the Board Director, Resources, to proceed with the necessary next steps to enable the Highworth Recreation Trust to appoint a preferred bidder to take over the operation of the Highworth Recreation Centre within the expected terms set out in paragraph 3.41 of the joint report and a one-off budgeted sum of up to £175,000 be provided by the Council towards agreed backlog maintenance works to facilitate the transfer.

(6) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services, the Board Director, Service Delivery, and the Board Director, Resources to complete all necessary documentation to transfer the Council's interest in the Highworth Recreation Centre building on a lease to the Highworth Recreation Trust, which will facilitate the transfer of operations and staff to the preferred bidder, on such terms he considers appropriate to protect the Council's interests.

(7) That it be noted that:

(a) The Council expects to deliver services within the overall cash limit for 2015/16;

(b) The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17 has yet to be published and therefore the funding assumptions in the joint report contain levels of uncertainty;

(c) The current gap between the assumed funding levels for 2016/17 and the current proposed cost of services, as set out in Table Three of the joint report, and that work is continuing to identify further options to close this gap for consideration by Members once actual funding levels are confirmed and before the Final Budget is recommended to Council;

(d) The implications for the Council's Budget 2016/17 of the proposals

affecting the Locality Fund, as set out in paragraph 3.38 of the joint report;

(e) The impact on minority groups has been considered for all savings proposals and a full Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken where an impact was perceived;

(f) The tax base for 2016/17 will be 69,545.8 and the estimated Council share of the Council Tax Collection Fund surplus used to support the 2016/17 Budget will be £1.462m and the deficit share for Business Rates will be £0.250m; and

(g) Work continues to be progressed on those aspects of the Change Programmes previously reported to and endorsed by Cabinet and where previous Cabinet decisions give the necessary authority to do so.

(8) That the Budget virements, as set out in Appendix 4 of the joint report, be approved.

(9) That the proposed Council Fees and Charges increases for specific areas, as set out in Appendix 5 of the joint report, be approved, and that all other fees and charges be increased by 3%.

(10) That the Local Council Tax Support (Reduction) Scheme in 2016/17 be unchanged from that for 2015/16, apart from the annual increases in allowances, applicable amounts and non-dependant deductions, which will be increased in line with the national scheme.

(11) That one-off funding of £2m be earmarked from specific Council reserves to support the implementation and cashflowing of the 2016/17 Budget proposals.

(12) That those new Budget proposals that do not directly affect front-line services be implemented by officers at the earliest opportunity, including undertaking consultation with staff where appropriate.

(13) That consultation commences for Budget proposals affecting front-line services with the outcome of that consultation being reported to Cabinet in February 2016 prior to considering the final Budget to be recommended to Council.

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

46. Capital Programme Monitoring - Second Quarter and Treasury Management Performance 2015/16

The Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, and the Board Director, Resources submitted a joint report setting out (a) the 2015/16 Capital Programme position as at the end of September 2015, (b) proposed changes to the Capital Programme, and (c) Mid-Year Treasury Management performance for 2015/16.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, commented on the joint report and explained that it addressed the projected outturn position of the Council's Capital Budget for 2015/16, proposed changes to the current Capital Programme, and highlighted the Council's Treasury Management performance to date for 2015/16.

Councillor Toby Elliott, Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning, referred to the Swindon 175 Celebrations and to the two historic locomotives that had recently returned to Swindon and the STEAM Museum.

Resolved – (1) That the Capital Programme position and mid-year Treasury Management performance for 2015/16, as set out in the joint report, be noted.

(2) That the issues affecting the Council's Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the joint report, be noted.

(3) That the additions to the Council's Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.3 of the joint report, be approved.

(4) That the changes to the Council's Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the joint report, be noted.

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

47. Result of the Consultation on 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 the outcome of the consultation on proposed changes to the Aiming High Short Breaks Service for disabled children, young people and their families (Minute 18, 2015/16 refers) and setting out proposed revised options based on the outcomes of the consultation.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, introduced the report and drew attention to the consultation responses received and the proposals that were now being put forward. She believed that these proposals if implemented would enable the service to refocus its work 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. She commented on the changes made as a result of the consultation responses and that she was recommending that the new offer should apply to new users of the service only.

Councillor Foley expressed her thanks to Mr Mark Green, Service Manager, Integrated Service for Disabled Children, and his team for the excellent service they provided, for the thorough consultation exercise they had undertaken and for the subsequent report that had been prepared.

Resolved – (1) That the responses to the consultation on the Aiming High Short Breaks Service, as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in the joint report and, in particular, the feedback received from the disabled young people at Thought Tank, be noted.

(2) That the Head of Children, Families and Community Health be authorised to implement no later than the 1st April 2016 all of the proposals as outlined in paragraph 3.4 of the joint report with the amendments made following the consultation process.

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

(4) That it be noted that the proposed approach for the Aiming High Short Breaks Service does not reduce funding, but enables the service to manage demand effectively from 2016/17 onwards within existing resource provision.

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

48. Future of Swindon Borough Council Operated Nurseries

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Board Director, Commissioning and the Head of Children, Families and Community Health submitted a joint report concerning the two children's nurseries currently directly operated by the Council and a proposal to start consultation and marketing in respect of their future.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, referred to the ways in which early years' education and childcare was provided across the Borough by different operators, such as large nursery chains, small private businesses, child-minders and maintained primary schools. She explained that the Council currently also directly operated two children's nurseries. She commented on the operation of these facilities and on the reasons why initial "soft market testing" had been undertaken. She highlighted why it was now proposed to consult on their future and her belief that given both the financial and capacity pressures faced by Children's Services the Council's continued provision of nurseries could no longer be seen as "core business".

Councillor Paul Dixon, Eastcott Ward Councillor, referred to the popularity and success of the Children's Nursery in his ward. He referred to the income the facility generated for the Council and the concern felt by service users at its loss. He was disappointed that the Cabinet was proposing to invest in the Highworth Recreation Centre to bring the facility to current standards but not in the Children's Nursery. He asked that if possible ward councillors be involved in the consultation process and discussions on the future of the facilities.

Councillor Foley reiterated her reasons for supporting the proposals within the report and to the differences between the Highworth Recreation Centre and the Children's Nursery. She confirmed that she was happy to involve ward councillors in the process and to provide them with further information on the soft market testing that had taken place.

Resolved – (1) That the result of the soft market testing associated with the operation of the Council's directly operated Nurseries undertaken in the summer of 2015, and as set out in the body of the joint report, be noted.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning (DCS/DASS) be authorised to consult on proposals to:

(a) market the Bright Start Nursery for a new provider to operate from the building under a lease; and

(b) close the Children's Nursery by September 2016 and provide assistance to parents seeking alternative nursery places.

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

49. Changes to Swindon Borough Council's Fostering Agency Foster Panel Membership

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Head of Children, Families and Community Health submitted a joint report concerning changes to the statutory membership requirements for Local Fostering Agency Panels, and setting out a proposal to amend the membership of the Swindon Foster Panel to remove

the need to appoint Councillors.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, referred to the significant workloads and time commitment associated with membership of the Swindon Foster Panel. She explained that recent changes in Regulations and the requirements for Foster Panels meant that it was now even more difficult for Councillors to participate successfully and actively in the work of the Panel, and she was supportive of there no longer being a requirement for councillors to serve on this body.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, expressed his support for the proposal and referred to the work undertaken by the Foster Panel. He stressed the importance of those involved having the time available to fully participate in the process.

Resolved – (1) That, for the reasons referred to in the joint report, the Council be recommended to remove the need to appoint Councillors to serve on the Swindon Foster Panel from the end of the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

(2) That it be noted that the Director of Children's Services (Board Director, Commissioning (DCS/ DASS) will discharge the Council's functions in respect of maintaining a Central List of persons who are considered to be suitable to be members of the fostering panel.

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

50. Response to Council Motion on Refugees

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive submitted a joint report setting out a response to a Motion submitted to, but not debated at, Full Council on 24th September 2015 requesting that the Council investigate the possibility of accommodating Middle Eastern refugees and to lobby the Government to deal with the crisis alongside its European Union partners (Minute 35 of the Council refers).

The Chair introduced the report and explained the action that the Council and its partners were taking in Swindon to support those who had been displaced from their home country for various reasons. He commented on the Borough's role in the South West Migration Partnership and with the Syrian Resettlement Programme. He referred to how Swindon compared to other South West authorities in responding to migrants and refugees with 200 now accommodated within Swindon under the dispersal programme. He commented on the "City of Sanctuary" initiative and on his recent letter to Swindon's Members of Parliament.

Councillor Emma Bushell commented on her reasons for seconding the original Council Motion and that whilst welcoming the contents of the report she hoped that the Council could do even more to support refugees and those who had been displaced from their home country. She asked whether the Leader of the Council would be prepared to meet with other Councillors and interested parties to see if it would be possible for the Borough to become involved in the City of Sanctuary initiative. Councillor Bushell referred to the remarks by Councillor Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, during Agenda Item 6 (Minute 45) in which he had referred to the concerns of the Harbour Project about future funding for the Government programme to accept additional refugees

from Syria.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bushell for her comments and confirmed that he would be happy to meet to discuss the matter. However, he reminded Cabinet and Councillors of the limited resources and capacity that was available to enable the Council to participate and to do more than it was already doing.

Resolved – (1) That the extent of the work the Council has already taken in accommodating those seeking asylum within the Borough, be noted and endorsed.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning continue to work closely with the Home Office and South West Councils to assist the current refugee crisis to accommodate refugees within the parameters set out in paragraph 3.9 of the joint report.

(3) That the Council be advised of the contents of this joint report in response to the Motion at the Council meeting on 24th September 2015 (Council Minute 35 refers).

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

51. References from Other Council Bodies - Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse 2015 - 2017

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Cabinet Member with portfolio responsibility for Reducing Domestic Violence), the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety and the Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a joint report concerning a recommendation arising from the meeting of the Swindon Community Safety Partnership Board on 9th November 2015 regarding the Council's support for the adoption of the "Swindon Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse 2015-2017".

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, expressed her support for the Strategy. She referred to the serious problem of domestic abuse and its effect on all those involved and for the Council and its partners.

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for the Housing and Public Safety, welcomed the Strategy and the way the Council would work together with partners to support the reduction of domestic abuse in Swindon.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, expressed his support for the Strategy and its aims. He congratulated the Swindon Community Safety Partnership Board and its officers and members on producing a significant partnership strategy setting out measures to reduce levels of domestic abuse in the Borough.

Resolved – That, further to Minute 4 of the Swindon Community Safety Partnership Board, the "Swindon Strategy to Reduce Domestic Abuse 2015-2017", be approved.

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

52.

Mr Gavin Jones, Chief Executive

The Chair reported that this was the last meeting of the Cabinet to be attended by Mr Gavin Jones, Chief Executive, who would be leaving the Borough Council on 15th January 2016 to take up a new role as Chief Executive of Essex County Council. The Chair thanked Mr Jones for his fourteen years' service to the Borough.

Resolved – That the Cabinet express its appreciation to Mr Gavin Jones, Chief Executive, for his service to the Borough and it offer him its best wishes for the future in his new role at Essex County Council.

53.

Mr Ian Willcox, Committee and Member Services Manager

The Chair advised that this was the last meeting of the Cabinet to be attended by Mr Ian Willcox, Committee and Member Services Manager, as he was leaving the Borough Council at the end of December 2015, after thirty one years' service to Swindon and Thamesdown Borough Councils.

Resolved – That the Cabinet express its appreciation to Mr Willcox for his service to the Borough and offer him its best wishes for the future.