

SCRUTINY

MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Ray Ballman, Mark Dempsey, Claire Ellis, Dale Heenan, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, James Robbins, Gary Sumner, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Chris Watts and Steve Weisinger.

Also in attendance were: Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills), Councillor Toby Elliott (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability), Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment), Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults' Health and Social Care), Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Communities and Place), Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), and Councillor Garry Perkins (Cabinet Member for Regeneration).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Timothy Swinyard and Vera Tomlinson.

66. 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 declarations were made:

- Councillor Gary Sumner made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Panel on School Organisation Decisions – Minute 10. Proposal to Increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Brimble Hill Primary Special School from 77 to 85 from September 2018) as his wife is currently employed as a Deputy Head teacher.
- Councillor James Robbins made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment) as he is a foster carer for Swindon Borough Council.
- Councillor Caryl Sydney-Smith made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment) as she is a School Governor at Oliver Tomkins Primary School.
- Councillor Bob Wright made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment) as his property is the former park bungalow transferred to Ferndale School.

67. Public Question Time

Mr Brian Shakespeare, Swindon Tenants Campaign Group, asked questions regarding the Council's proposals for the regeneration of Queens Drive, specifically:

- a) Why this matter was not brought for discussion to the meeting of the Housing Advisory Forum CMAG on 7th March 2018 given the nature of the proposals.

- b) Whether the Council will suspend its proposals for the redevelopment of Queens Drive until tenants have been consulted on the matter at a meeting of the Housing Advisory Forum CMAG.

Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, responded to Mr Shakespeare's questions at the meeting.

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon Wick resident, referred to the digitisation programme implemented by Northampton County Council and the discussion at the last meeting of this Committee on how lessons learned from its programme might be used to inform the Council's own digitisation programme. Mr Worman asked whether, given the perilous state of said council, are there any lessons that can be adapted by Swindon Borough Council and, if so, what?

The Chair advised that a written answer would be provided in accordance with the Public Question Time protocol.

68. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

69. Consideration of Cabinet and Cabinet Panel on School Organisation Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 14th March 2018, and from the meeting of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation held on 15th March 2018.

a) Cabinet Minutes – 14th March 2018

86. Moredon Recreation Ground - Multi Sports Hub Proposals

Councillor David Renard, (Leader of the Council), and Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Communities and Place), responded to questions put by Councillors Dale Heenan, Des Moffatt, Chris Watts, and the Chair on the following matters:

- The accuracy of details within the Council's recent press release regarding these proposals, and actions required to ensure that cross party support, where appropriate, is accurately reflected within future press releases.
- The capacity within the Council's Legal and Property Team to ensure that any leases and sales documents are completed within expected timelines.
- Potential connections with the work being undertaken to achieve savings by the Council's Transformation Team.

Resolved – That Minute 86 of the Cabinet be noted.

87. Queens Drive Regeneration

Councillor David Renard, (Leader of the Council), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills), Councillor Toby Elliott (Cabinet

Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability), and Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety), responded to questions put by Councillors Dale Heenan, Des Moffatt, Chris Watts, and the Chair on the following matters:

- The expected net gain in the number of accommodation units with discrepancies in the report indicating that it might be either 43 or 60.
- The survey of any utilities which may be underneath these roads and the assessment of the cost of moving these before final site decisions are made.
- The level of income from social rents necessary to support the required borrowing for the project, and whether this will be sufficient to secure the planned development without excluding low income households.
- The methodology for the assessment of average property rents within the proposal.
- Consultation with the rent-paying residents affected by the addition of £25m to the Housing Revenue Account for this scheme.
- The potential of similar projects being built in other areas across the Borough.
- The impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act, coming in to force in April 2018, on the plans for the demolition and rebuilding on the site of St Ives Court.
- Extending the borrowing period of this scheme to 40 years and the Council's policy on building social housing across the Borough going forward.
- The feasibility of postponing the determination of the tenure mix on site until confirmation of the Homes England funding for social housing.

Resolved – That Minute 87 of the Cabinet be noted.

88. Budget Management Update

Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment), and the Director of Finance responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey and Des Moffatt on the following matters:

- The number of children going in to care in the two years prior to the closure of the children's centres and in the years since the closure, and to the impact on the over spend indicated in the children's services budget.
- Deferred payments to service providers in Adult Social Care and Children's Services at the end of the current financial year.

Resolved – That Minute 88 of the Cabinet be noted.

89. Swindon Local Transport Plan

Councillor Toby Elliott (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability), Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Communities and Place), and Councillor Cathy Martyn (Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety) responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey, Dale Heenan, Des Moffatt, James Robbins, and the Chair on the following matters:

- Measuring whether the existing transport strategy is meeting the objectives on carbon emissions, and whether carbon emissions are increasing or decreasing across the Borough.

- The lack of inclusion of Bus Rapid Transit in the updated strategy, and any subsequent change to the Council's policy on this matter as a result.
- Value for money on the investments made during the current strategy period, and the measurement of the beneficial impacts of those projects.
- Potential funding arrangements for the bridge associated with the Kingsdown development proposals.
- Plans to improve the infrastructure to address traffic problems at the main crossroads in Stratton St Margaret.
- Air quality levels within Swindon during 2017, and the process for reporting to Defra when a limit is breached.
- The timeline for the Transport Strategy refresh.
- The identification of extra funding to address parking issues on Rodbourne Road.
- Contingency plans and funding for projects which exceed projected timeframes.

Resolved – That Minute 89 of the Cabinet be noted.

90. School Admission Arrangements 2019-20 and Education Transport Policy 2019-20

Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment) responded to a question put by the Chair on transport arrangements for children affected by domestic violence.

Resolved – That Minute 90 of the Cabinet be noted.

91. Membership of England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum

Councillor David Renard, (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Toby Elliott (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability) responded to questions put by Councillor Mark Dempsey and the Chair on the following matters:

- How the impact and effectiveness of membership of this Forum will be measured.
- Strategic transport issues pertinent to Swindon, and potential connections with other authorities along the M4 corridor.

Resolved – That Minute 91 of the Cabinet be noted.

92. References from Other Council Bodies: Health and Wellbeing Board - Swindon Substance Misuse Strategy 2017 to 2022

Resolved – That Minute 92 of the Cabinet be noted.

93. Amendments to Residents' Parking Schemes

Resolved – That Minute 93 of the Cabinet be noted.

94. Swindon Borough Council (Southern Connector Road, New Eastern Villages) Compulsory Purchase Order 2018

Councillor Toby Elliott (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability) responded to questions put by Councillors Dale Heenan and the Chair on the possible amendment of the Compulsory Purchase Order to ensure that there is sufficient land available to dual the road in the event of future infrastructure requirements.

Resolved – That Minute 94 of the Cabinet be noted.

95. Capital Monitoring Quarter 3 2017-18

Resolved – That Minute 95 of the Cabinet be noted.

b) Cabinet Panel on School Organisation Minutes – 15th March 2018

10. Proposal to Increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Brimble Hill Primary Special School from 77 to 85 from September 2018

Resolved – That Minute 10 of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation be noted.

70. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within her portfolio of responsibility:

- Children and Family Services including Early Help, Youth Offending Team, Young Person Substance Misuse team, Targeted Mental Health, Education Welfare, Educational Psychology, Youth Engagement, Services for Disabled Children
- Children's Social Work services
- Community Health Services including Health Visitors, School Nurses and Family Nurse Partnership, Paediatric Therapy Services, Speech and Language and Portage
- Local Safeguarding Children's Board
- Corporate Parenting Board
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Education Services including, Provision for Early Years, LA Maintained Schools, Provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Education Other Than At School, Tuition Service, Championing Excellence and Promoting High Standards
- Children Voluntary Sector Contracts
- Public Health – Children
- Fostering and adoption services
- Troubled Families
- Education Services including, Provision for Early Years, LA Maintained Schools, Provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Education Other Than At School, Tuition Service, Championing Excellence and Promoting High Standards
- Educational Challenge Board

- Schools' Forum
- Music Services
- Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre
- Governor Support services
- Traded Services

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's vision for 2016-2020:

- Priority two: Offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places.
- Pledge 15 - In addition to the two new free secondary schools, build one secondary and 12 primary schools to meet the needs of our increasing population.
- Pledge 17 - Improve educational attainment, in particular at ages 16-19 so we are above the average in England within five years.
- Priority four: Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.
- Pledge 28 - Increase the number of foster carers in Swindon so that every 'child looked after' who should be, is placed in their home borough.
- Pledge 29 - Work with all of the 1270 families in Swindon who are in most need of support by 2020 in phase 2 of the Troubled Families Programme

Councillor Foley responded to the observations and questions put by Councillors Ray Ballman, Mark Dempsey, Claire Ellis, Dale Heenan, Emma Faramarzi, Des Moffatt, James Robbins, Gary Sumner, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The detailed review undertaken by the Director of Children's Services to assess the progress Children's Social Care in Swindon has made on the improvement journey since the Ofsted inspection in 2014.
- The proposals to remodel the Early Years Help service, and the options for changes being considered.
- The impact of the closures of children's centres on the number of children being taken into care in Swindon.
- The work being done to investigate instances of child exploitation within Swindon.
- Responsibility for the maintenance of Ferndale Field being transferred to the relevant Parish Council.
- The level of support offered by health visitors since the closure of children's centres, and the inclusion work being done to capture those who would not normally seek to access support services.
- The recruitment of a dedicated post within Children's Services to pro-actively focus on recruitment and retention, and when the appointment is expected.
- The Care Quality Commission having highlighted the length of time taken for children to access mental health support services as being an issue in Swindon, and the work being undertaken to improve this provision.
- Links to pastoral care teams at secondary schools in Swindon, and how the Council can help to ensure that schools have sufficient resources to assist pupils with mental health issues.

- The reasons behind the maintenance backlog at St Luke's School, and the general condition of schools across Swindon with regards to maintenance requirements.
- The resources set aside to invest in the delivery of children's services, and what will be targeted to address the challenges within the service to ensure its future financial sustainability.
- The maintenance backlog on the 'Education Other Than At School' service.
- The number of agency social workers at Swindon Borough Council.
- Concerns expressed over secondary schools joining multi-academy trusts.
- The future commissioning of, and funding for, the Oakfield Unit.
- What the trigger points are in terms of class sizes when determining whether a new school should be built, or if an existing school could be expanded.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Foley 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.

71. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation, was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his portfolio of responsibility:

- Financial Management (Revenue and Capital Programme)
- Finance Management Overview
- Preparing Future Year's Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan
- Procurement
- Implementing Commercialisation Strategy
- Lead Member for commercial housing development
- The Council's Transformation Programme including Stronger Together
- Revenue and Benefits Services
- Developing Welfare and Benefits Policy
- Cabinet Member for the Commercial Investment Fund and Procurement
- Financial Management (Revenue and Capital Programme)
- Finance Management Overview
- Preparing Future Year's Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Commercialisation is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's vision for 2016-2020:

- Priority four: Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.
- Pledge 24 - Provide early support for people in debt so that we significantly reduce the need to use bailiffs to recover Council Tax and other debts.

Councillor Holland responded to the observations and questions put by Councillors Ray Ballman, Des Moffatt, James Robbins, and the Chair on the following matters:

- The work of the Social Inclusion and Enterprise Manager in publicising and encouraging residents to join Credit Unions, and involvement with the credit union in Pinehurst.
- The movement of people on to Universal Credit, and subsequent rises in the level of Council Tax arrears potentially linked to this increase, which the Council is attempting to address.
- The amount of capital invested under the commercialisation programme in Swindon and elsewhere.
- Whether issues with the maintenance of the commercial real estate owned by the Council is preventing the full use of these spaces being utilised, such as The Platform not having its potential realised.
- The regeneration context of commercial development decisions being determined on a case by case basis.
- The nature of the Council's investments, and the potential for liquidity, should there be a financial crisis.
- The maintenance backlog at both Lydiard Park and St Luke's School, and the sufficiency of the funding set aside for maintenance work on the Council's assets.

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

72. Work Programme 2017/2018

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2017/2018 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meetings on 19th June 2017 and 17th July 2017, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

The Chair provided an update with regard to the reports expected to be submitted to future meetings of the Committee on (i) the outsourcing of services and (ii) Policing in Swindon. It was agreed that these reports would be added to the Work Programme for the 2018/2019 Municipal Year.

73. 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.

Scrutiny Committee
19th March 2018

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon Wick resident, referred to the digitisation programme implemented by Northampton County Council and the discussion at the last meeting of this Committee on how lessons learned from its programme might be used to inform the Councils own digitisation programme. Mr Worman asked whether, given the perilous state of said council, are there any lessons that can be adapted by Swindon Borough Council and, if so, what?

The Chair advised that a written answer would be provided in accordance with the Public Question Time protocol.

Response provided:

Dear Mr Worman,

Many thanks for your question at the recent scrutiny committee. It is important we do learn lessons from colleagues and projects in other local authorities and often more lessons are available when projects go wrong than when they go right. To that end the government have supported all of us to learn from the Northamptonshire by commissioning a Best Value Inspection which I have pleasure in attaching for your perusal. I will be sharing this with my senior colleagues at Swindon and through our transformation programme we will be striving to make Swindon a more modern, efficient effective council to best enable us to serve our residents.

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