

SCRUTINY

MONDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2018

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Emma Bushell, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Barbara Parry, Maureen Penny, James Robbins, Tim Swinyard, Caryl Sydney-Smith, Chris Watts and Steve Weisinger.

Also in attendance were: Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economy Prosperity), Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment), Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults), Councillor Mary Martin (Cabinet Member for Children and School Attainment), Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning), Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services) and Councillor Imtiyaz Shaikh. Imtiyaz Shaikh

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Vera Tomlinson.

21. 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 Jim Robbins made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 5 (Consideration of Cabinet Decisions) as he is a foster carer.

Councillor Tim Swinyard made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 6 (Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session – Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity) as he works for Nationwide.

22. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th August 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

23. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

24. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 5th September 2018.

30. Budget Management 2018/19

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Brian Mattock, Des Moffatt, Jim Robbins and the Chair on the following matters:

- The numbers of agency social workers employed by the Council, and plans to reduce this number.

- The potential impact on children's services of the high turnover of support agency staff.
- The allocation of £1.626m of corporately held inflation budgets, and how this does not form part of the £2m contingency funds.
- The forecast £111k overspend on current void levels within the Housing Revenue Account, and progress towards achieving an improved turnaround of council properties.
- The steps being taken to ensure a balanced budget, given any potential increases to the budget for children's services that may be required.
- The anticipated date for when the council's housing company will generate profit.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 30 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.

31. Customer Access Strategy

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services) responded to comments and questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Emma Faramarzi, Brian Mattock, Des Moffatt, and the Chair on the following matters:

- Operational improvements which may arise from assigning officers to directly receive telephone calls in departments such as housing, as opposed to operating a call centre approach.
- The anticipated timeframe within which the levels of staff turnover in customer services will stabilise, and response times improve.
- The potential impact on intelligence gathering when a large lag in response time results in residents ending calls, along with the impact this might have on those members of society who are unable to utilise alternative electronic methods of contact.
- Improvement plans being considered for the Wat Tyler Reception area.
- The shift towards online communication across society as a whole, and acknowledgement that the Council will still have a responsibility to represent those groups less able to utilise this communication method.
- How increasing the number of online transactions is expected to free up telephone lines, which will benefit those less able to communicate electronically.
- How any redesign of communication methods within a service should take in to account the views and experience of frontline staff.

Resolved – That Minute 31 of the Cabinet be noted.

32. Vision, Priorities and Pledges

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economy Prosperity), Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment) and Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Bushell, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Tim Swinyard, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The management of assets and investments by Parish Councils.

- The economic viability of constructing solar noise barriers within Swindon, and possible alternatives for delivering sound barriers.
- The potential for the St John's Street car park site to be used for new housing development by the council.
- Alternative options for delivering the Thamesdown Drive extension if funding cannot be externally sourced.
- Central government not yet having clarified the expected aid for social housing and the impact of this on the pledges.
- The location of out of town buses under the proposals for the bus boulevard on Fleming Way, and the lack of clarity on the future use of the current bus station car park.
- Opportunities for building new roads in Swindon.
- Plans for improving the higher education offer in Swindon.
- The ownership of the Mechanics Institute and options for its future development.
- The possibilities of opening up bus lanes to cars during certain periods, and the benefits this may provide in some areas of Swindon.
- The reasoning behind the addition of a pledge solely dedicated to preventing homelessness.
- Development on the plans for relocating the art gallery with a commitment to making the best of the collections, and how the safety of the collections is ensured during this transition period.

Resolved – That Minute 32 of the Cabinet be noted.

33. Annual Review of Local Ombudsman Complaints

Resolved – That Minute 33 of the Cabinet be noted.

34. Rodbourne Traffic Issues

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economy Prosperity), Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment) and Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services) responded to questions put by Councillors Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Jim Robbins, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The numbers of drivers who are fined for using the bus gate on Thamesdown Drive to access the Outlet Centre, and what the Council can do to assist in reducing this number.
- The suggestion that it is Rodbourne residents' view that the proposals outlined within the report will not improve the traffic situation, and that they are dissatisfied with the steps taken by the Council to resolve this issue.
- The forthcoming meetings involving ward councillors, relevant Cabinet Members and officers to discuss the traffic issues, which will be followed by consultation meetings with residents.
- The difficulties for the Council in addressing the traffic issues without the co-operation of the McArthur Glen Outlet Centre, and the deliverable options available to it.
- Whether opportunities had been missed to impose traffic-improving conditions as part of planning proposals approved on the centre in the past.

- How the management team at the centre have employed a consultant to review the traffic issues, and it is hoped that improvement plans will be forthcoming as a result.
- How the Council is addressing the traffic issues in the Rodbourne area that do not relate to the Outlet Centre.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 34 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.

25. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity

Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity), 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:

- Set the strategic vision to allow the economy to prosper.
- Provide the overarching direction to enable the Borough to have the range of vocational and higher education opportunities necessary to meet employers' needs for skills.
- Provide the political leadership for business growth in all areas including town centre, investment, R&D, Switch on to Swindon, and tourism.
- Provide the strategic vision for the next generation of digital cities.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

To deliver these, Councillor Donachie has been allocated the following specific responsibilities:

- Represent the Council on the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- Adult Learning.
- Higher/Tertiary Education.
- Skills.
- Country Parks (securing sustainable uses).
- Strategic Parking assets.
- Parking Services / Bus gate locations and creation, charges, and enforcement.
- Apprentices.
- Renewable energy.
- Client for PPS.

In overseeing these areas, the Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity is responsible for delivering the following Priorities and Pledges of Swindon's Vision:

- Pledge 1: Deliver the Government standard Superfast Broadband coverage to all commercial and domestic premises in the Borough by 2017.
- Pledge 16: Improve the reputation and image of Swindon to attract inward investment.
- Pledge 18: Increase the number of businesses employing young people as an apprentice from 15% to 20% (an additional 280).
- Pledge 19: Secure a range of options to access Higher Education in Swindon.

Councillor Donachie responded to the observations and questions put by Councillors Emma Faramarzi, Brian Mattock, Maureen Penny, Jim Robbins, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The revenue lost from visitors parking at the Outlet Centre and walking in to town centre as a result of the prices having been raised in the car parks in the centre.
- The possibility of having digital boards on the two Swindon roundabouts on the M4, and the advertising and income generation opportunities this could provide.
- Measuring the visits to the 'Visit Swindon' website to determine what pages are generating the most interest to maximise advertising potential.
- The latest position with regards to the 'Switch on to Swindon' project.
- The projected impact of Brexit on the Swindon economy. It was agreed that this would be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme, to be discussed once officers have completed the required research.
- The proposal from a private company to temporarily use the Kimmerfields site which would have generated income for the Council, and the reasons why this proposal was turned down.
- The length of time the parking meters at Coate Water and Lydiard Park had been out of action, and the revenue lost during that time.
- The potential temporary uses of the museum site which could generate income for the Council.
- Rural areas within Swindon being highlighted in more detail on the 'Visit Swindon' website.
- How small businesses in rural areas are suffering from a lack of good broadband speeds, and the plans in place to address this.
- The number of cameras on bus gates, and future plans to increase the numbers in operation.
- Proposals to improve the life for residents in the more deprived wards within in Swindon.
- What the council has been doing to improve the apprenticeship offer in Swindon.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Oliver Donachie 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.

(3) To agree the addition of an item providing an update on the impact of Brexit in Swindon to the 2018/2019 Work Programme.

26. Work Programme 2018/2019

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2018/2019 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 18th June 2018, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2018/2019 be noted, subject to the addition of the item on the impact of Brexit in Swindon.

27.

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.