

## **SCRUTINY**

**MONDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2018**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Emma Faramarzi (Vice-Chair), Emma Bushell, Fionuala Foley, Nick Martin, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Barbara Parry, James Robbins, Timothy Swinyard, 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), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity), Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults), Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment), Councillor Gary Sumner (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning) and Councillor Stan Pajak.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Vera Tomlinson.

### **46. 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 James Robbins made a personal, non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda item 7 (Possible effects of leaving the EU) as he works for a Member of the European Parliament.

### **47. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **48. Public Question Time**

Mr Roy Worman, Haydon Wick, asked several questions regarding the Council's draft Waste Strategy for 2019-2029 and the Council's proposals for updating streetlights in the Borough, specifically:

- a) The reasoning behind the introduction of a £5 charge to residents for replacing waste boxes.
- b) How the stated figure of 51% of the survey respondents indicating a charge of £5 or more per box was reasonable was calculated, given that 44.83% had indicated a preference of £3, and only 29.12% had indicated a preference of £5, according to the chart in the report.
- c) The zero cost to homeowners for providing waste bins at newly built houses.
- d) Funding for the resultant additional costs in terms of the extra equipment and staff required if food waste was to be collected on a weekly basis.
- e) Why 'various service changes and lack of communication to residents in recent years' are being cited as the possible cause for the decline in recycling rates by almost 10%.
- f) Whether the £72m proposed for the updating of streetlights across the Borough will include improving visibility at pedestrian crossings.

The Chair advised that a written answer would be provided to b) in accordance with the Public Question Time Protocol. Councillor Maureen Penny, Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment, responded to Mr Worman's other questions at the meeting.

#### **49. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

The Committee considered a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

##### *Item 48. Budget Update*

Councillor David Renard (Leader of the Council), Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance), Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity), Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults), Councillor Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for the Town Centre), and Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment) responded to questions put by Councillors Fionuala Foley, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Jim Robbins, Tim Swinyard, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- When the financial settlement for local government is expected to be announced, given the current issues with the vote on Brexit.
- What the highest expected charge will be, once all charges and fees have been uplifted by 5% or a rounded price.
- The proposals for the splash park, and the creation of other leisure facilities.
- The Council's ability to contest de-registration of properties given that some are left empty and become derelict.
- The potential for parish councils to receive a portion of the surplus on the council tax element of the Collection Fund.
- How the relief for council tax reduction is calculated, which can lead to those areas with the highest ratio of benefit claimants receiving the least amount of funds.
- The process for residents to register when the waste collection team have damaged a waste bin, and to get a new bin issued.
- How the current planning assumption of basic council tax increasing by 2.99% for 2019/20, along with an additional adult social care precept of 1%, will be applied as 3.99%.
- How the £2.29m changes proposed for 2019/20, due to the increase in demand for Supported Living Placements, will include sheltered homes.
- The additional £84m of Children's Services funding over five years, and which twenty councils this will be allocated to.
- The reasons for the additional election costs which have been incurred this year.
- The change in management responsibility for cost centres which has resulted in services for travellers being transferred internally from Housing to Public Health.
- The Council's intent towards the building of a Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF) waste plant.
- The research and development being undertaken by Public Power Solutions in to the treatment and processing of waste.

- How caps for the LED lights proposed for street lighting across the Borough have been included in the business case to reduce the impact of light brightness in residential areas.
- The halving of funding for long standing grants to cultural groups, and the subsequent risk this may cause in losing match funding from the Arts Council.
- The ability of the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery to fund itself given the shortening of opening hours and the reduction in staff numbers.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 48 of the Cabinet be noted.

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

*Item 49. Capital Monitoring Quarter 2 2018-19*

Councillor Des Moffatt made an observation regarding the increased revenue that should be generated as a result of removing the swimming pool at Lydiard House.

Resolved – That Minute 49 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Item 50. Mid-Year Treasury Performance 2018/2019*

Councillor Russell Holland (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance) and the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), responded to a question put by Councillor Des Moffatt regarding the effect of prudential borrowing rules on the Housing Revenue Account, whereby any borrowing has to be able to be revenue funded.

Resolved – That Minute 50 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Item 51. References from Other Council Bodies – Corporate Parenting Advisory Board and Health and Wellbeing Board*

Councillor Brian Ford (Cabinet Member for Adults) made an observation on how those with Learning Disabilities in employment are not included within the figures calculated for the Supported Employment Strategy, leading to artificially low numbers.

Resolved – That Minute 51 of the Cabinet be noted.

*Item 52. Draft Waste Strategy 2019-2029*

Councillor Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment), responded to questions put by Councillors Emma Faramarzi, Jane Milner-Barry and the Chair on the following matters:

- The expected publication date of the draft waste strategy by central government.
- Whether the successful work undertaken in South Oxfordshire to increase its recycling rates has been referenced, given the Councils target of increasing its own recycling rate to 60% by 2029.
- How surplus heat from the SRF process can assist in the processing of food waste.

- The expected markets for the outcome from the SRF process which includes anaerobic digestion, remedial work for soil, bio gas, and possibly the fuelling of vehicles.
- The potential problem for residents from the odour of food waste bins left out for collection, particularly in the summer months.

Resolved – That Minute 52 of the Cabinet be noted.

## **50. Leader of the Council: Six Month Update**

Further to Minute 5/2018, and in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, was in attendance to report to the Committee on the Authority's performance in the first half of the 2018/19 Municipal Year in progressing the Council's priorities and targets, as outlined in his Annual presentation to the Committee at its June meeting. As in previous years, as requested by the Committee, the report outlined particular examples of where the Council had performed well, and also advised on the challenges facing the Council.

The Leader confirmed that, since the adoption of the Council's Vision, Priorities and Pledges in 2015, some of the Pledges had been delivered and new issues and opportunities had emerged. As such, it had been necessary to update the Pledges this year to reflect these changes. The Leader highlighted some of the achievements against the Pledges during 2018/19, which included:

- Pledge 3a Kimmerfields: Zurich having reaffirmed its commitment to the town, confirming that it hopes to build new purpose-built offices on the Kimmerfields site, next door to its current home in the Tri-Centre.
- Pledge 3d Carriage Works: The unique and historic buildings have been regenerated and reimagined and are now home to a vibrant hub for learning, creative and digital industries in an emerging tech hotspot.
- Pledge 3f North Star: The Council recently granted planning permission on the North Star development and swift progress is expected on site, with SevenCapital signalling its intention to begin work in the next few months.
- Pledge 6b Wichelstowe Development: As the Joint Venture at Wichelstowe has been established, work has gone into the drafting and negotiation of the s106 planning agreement to secure the necessary infrastructure to support the development. The District Centre phase continues with the construction of the Deanery Secondary School, due to open in September 2019. The Hall and Woodhouse project is nearing completion and is due to open early in the New Year. In addition, the unique footbridge, commissioned from Sebastien Boyesen, is under construction. The canal restoration and public square are clearly visible on site and on target for completion. Housing delivery within the District Centre is expected to commence in spring 2019.

The Leader, in his report, also highlighted future challenges which included:

- The impact of Brexit.
- The uncertainty surrounding local government funding from April 2020 onwards.
- The increase of demand-led social care pressures on Children's and Adult's Services.
- The quality of the broadband infrastructure that is available to businesses and customers, and its impact on the competition between Swindon and other places for investment as the internet-based economy continues to develop.

- Making use of successful partnerships and membership of organisations such as the England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum.

Councillor Renard and Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity) responded to questions and observations put by Councillors Emma Faramarzi, Nick Martin, Brian Mattock, Jane Milner-Barry, Des Moffatt, Barbara Parry, Jim Robbins, Tim Swinyard, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The progress of implementing the Vision, Priorities and Pledges by officers.
- How the Planning Committee balances competing demands when considering proposals such as the North Star Village for example, where the proposed Snowdome building will not be 'zero carbon' but will grow Swindon's economy.
- How the proposed developments at the North Star Village will attract visitors from large distances, but will have a resultant increase in traffic and travel emissions within the town which may not be of benefit to Swindon residents or its environment.
- How Ward councillors can liaise with planning officers in ensuring that any planning conditions imposed on the North Star development are met.
- The interrelationship between the capital spend and revenue savings planned at Coate Water, and what is being done to ensure that this investment is not wasted and that the right support is in place for this asset.
- The significant development that has taken place so far at Kimmersfields and expectations of when the project will be finished, given that Homes England is a key partner and owns 40% of the remaining site to be developed.
- How Zurich are the 'anchor tenant' in Kimmersfields, and the plans for the Tricentre 1 building that they will be vacating.
- The creation of a Town Centre Movement Strategy to evaluate traffic movement in and around the town centre, which would take in to account the implications of consented and planned new development whilst providing evidence to assist with the prudent and responsible management of the network, as discussed by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th July 2018.
- The slippage on delivering the southern access routes in to the Wichelstowe development, and the changes that have been made to the design. The Committee noted that the Local Enterprise Partnership funding for this project has to be used by March 2021, and that there will be knock on effects to the rest of the development if the southern access routes have not been completed by then.
- Proposals for the park and ride facilities at Junction 15 and Junction 16 of the M4, plans for re-opening a park and ride facility in North Swindon, and whether a budget has been set to improve the traffic situation in Rodbourne.
- How to make connectivity work across the Borough, ensuring a joined-up approach to delivering proposals.
- How the Business Engagement Officer can assist businesses in Rodbourne with their concerns such as the lack of street signage and the travel times within the area potentially putting off visitors. It is anticipated that the introduction of tariff matching in the Bristol Street car park in March 2019 should help alleviate some of the traffic problems in the Rodbourne area.
- Complaints received regarding the new fee systems on the car parks in the town centre, and that business owners in the town centre would like free parking introduced to compete with out of town areas.

- Recognising the importance of having a strong parking enforcement regime across the Borough, and the current recruitment campaign for four Enforcement Officer vacancies.
- The excellent career development choices provided for young people by apprenticeships, and the Council's Strategy on this matter. The Committee noted that the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee had an item on its agenda for 30th January 2019 to review how the Council encourages companies to provide meaningful apprenticeships resulting in jobs.
- The possibility of Parish Councils becoming involved in the provision of vehicular charging points across the Borough.
- The shortage of social workers nationally and the problems this causes the Council in driving forward its agenda of improvements and ensuring that children develop meaningful relationships with staff.
- Resolving the issues between the salaries and employment offer for permanent and agency social worker staff.
- The reasoning behind the early finish of Swindon Challenge now that there is a more collaborative approach across schools in Swindon, and more rigorous and detailed plans are in place. The Committee noted that organisations such as the Swindon Secondary Schools Attendance Network and the Swindon Association of Secondary Heads are helping to shape best practice and introduce action plans, which will be a positive step forward in improvements and attainment.

Resolved – That Councillor Renard be thanked for his informative presentation of his half-year update report, and for his full and open responses to members' questions on the issues raised.

## **51. Possible effects of leaving the EU**

The Committee considered a report setting out the issues identified so far for the Council in light of the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union ("Brexit") on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The report also addressed the Council's response to Brexit through both its inward investment and business retention and expansion programmes. The report was submitted following this Committee's request for an update at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (Minute 26 refers) along with a subsequent Council resolution on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (Minute 41 refers).

Councillor David Renard, Leader of the Council, and Councillor Oliver Donachie (Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity) responded to questions and observations put by Councillors Des Moffatt, Stan Pajak, Jim Robbins, Chris Watts and the Chair on the following matters:

- The potential effects on the Council if there is a 'no deal' situation, particularly regarding issues such as the benefits currently gained from European funding.
- The contingencies in place should civil unrest result from the Brexit issue.
- How the Council, through the Local Resilience Forum and with support from the Business Retention, Expansion and Inward Investment Team, can assist businesses with considering eventualities and creating plans for Brexit.
- How smaller businesses can access support through organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and The Federation of Small Businesses. The Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, through the Growth Hub, has also published information to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

- The consideration given to meta-economic circumstances (such as larger businesses dominating demand and supply, impacting on the ability of smaller businesses to compete) and how the Council can react to issues in, and support the needs of, key sectors not directly under its control.
- Concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on the trade of exports to the European Union (EU).
- The effect of the referendum result on the number of EU workers in Swindon, and the number of staff who might be EU citizens affected by the need to apply for Settled or Pre-Settled status.
- The potential impact on children's social care services if those EU citizens currently employed within the service decide to leave, and whether the Council will look outside the EU for recruitment in the future.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Chair and Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity be asked to report the outcomes from this discussion to the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Council.

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

## **52. Work Programme 2018/2019**

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

## **53. 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.

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