

Leader's Annual Report to Scrutiny

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th June 2018

Author: Leader of the Council

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To allow the Leader of the Council to set out the Administration's record in the 2017/18 Municipal Year, as well as the strategic priorities for the 2018/19 Municipal Year.
- 1.2 To allow the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions about those priorities.
- 1.3 The body of the report contains references to a number of the Council's plans and policies and allows the Scrutiny Committee to discharge one of its functions under Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the Leader's comments about the strategic direction for the Council for the year ahead.
- 2.2 Put relevant questions to the Leader of Council.
- 2.3 Decide if any changes to the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes are required as a result of the progress report.
- 2.4 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

Achievements in 2017/18

- 3.1 The Swindon Vision, Priorities, and Pledges remain at the heart of the Administration's activities and Members can visit the Council's website to monitor performance. There are a few areas that I would like to highlight.
 - 3.1.1 Pledge 14: Build up to 3,500 homes on Wichelstowe. The Council has both signed the joint venture agreement with Barratt Homes and, following a competitive tender, has secured a quality new pub and restaurant near Waitrose. Councillor Toby Elliott, as the Cabinet Member, is to be congratulated in providing the political leadership to secure this progress.
 - 3.1.2 Pledge 15: To build one secondary and 12 primary schools. Ever since we formed the Administration in 2003, we have made the provision of schools a priority. I am delighted that this has ensured that Swindon

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Steve Jones, (01793) 463602, SteveJones@swindon.gov.uk.

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remains one of the top Councils in the country for providing access to primary and secondary pupils' preferred choice of schools. While there may be some who have cried "delay" when there has been local opposition to a new school building, we have put the needs of Swindon's children first. Councillor Fionuala Foley, the previous Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment deserves recognition in securing this. In addition, Councillor Foley took up the challenge set by OFSTED to work with academies and schools and she secured £600,000 over three years to support improved attainment. It is regrettable that this funding did not receive all-party support at Council.

- 3.1.3 Pledge 22 – to secure the North Star Regional Leisure destination. When the original developer encountered difficulties, there were those who called for the Council to take back the site and terminate the development agreement. Had we done this, we would probably only just have completed a re-tendering exercise. We choose to support Seven Capital, a major development company, when it decided to buy out the original party. By having confidence in our new private sector partners, we now have outline planning permission for North Star Village and we are awaiting the final application. This will cover both North Star and the highly successful Designer Outlet Village. Councillor Garry Perkins has been the advocate and lead for this particular scheme.
- 3.1.4 Alongside the Vision, last year the Council also adopted a new library strategy, which has massively increased access to the core libraries. There was vocal opposition to the changes it proposed. Had the Council listened to the siren voices, we would have had fewer libraries, open fewer hours. Councillor Mary Martin deserves the credit for seeing this through to such a successful outcome for residents.
- 3.1.5 Lydiard House and Park remains open and work has already started to improve the historic building. Residents were told all manner of horror stories about what would happen to Lydiard and I am delighted to report that through the work of councillor Garry Perkins, and more recently Keith Williams, these have all been refuted. Lydiard is now moving towards breaking even; however, this does not address how we will raise the additional money for investment to improve the whole site further.
- 3.1.6 The Council has continued to reduce the number of delayed discharges of care. Swindon has achieved a reduction of 450 bed days' delays in May 2017 to 30 in March 2018. More older people are being supported at home with a reduction in permanent admission to residential and nursing care from 192 in 2016/17 to 165 in 2017/18

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- 3.2 I would also like to thank Oliver Donachie, Russell Holland, and Cathy Martyn for all their hard work over the last year, much of which has been reported to Scrutiny through the Members' own Question and Answer reports.
- 3.3 In addition to the work of Cabinet Members, I would also like to thank the Council's Officers for their professionalism, commitment, and dedication towards delivering the Councils' agenda. While one consequence of the creation of the strong Leader-Cabinet model is that some officers, of necessity have to spend more time working with Cabinet Members, this does not detract from the fact that the Council as a whole employs them. Unlike civil servants who only answer to the government, officers answer to all Members.

Challenges for the Year Ahead

Refreshing the Pledges

- 3.4 Since Council adopted the Vision, I am delighted to report that we have completed the following pledges:
- 3.4.1 We have ensured that at least 95% of the Borough has access to the government's standard of superfast broadband (Pledge 1);
- 3.4.2 The Carlton Street and Wyvern car parks were demolished (Pledge 3);
- 3.4.3 We have made the case to Whitehall for the Thamesdown Drive extension, to make the case for the road that the previous Thamesdown Borough Council failed to secure (Pledge 4);
- 3.4.4 The new town health centre has opened to replace Carfax Street (Pledge 5);
- 3.4.5 Sussex Place, the refurbished Sussex Square, is complete and was visited by Dominic Raab MP, the Housing Minister in March 2018 (Pledge 8);
- 3.4.6 We have reduced the use of bailiffs with residents who have fallen into debt from Council Tax or housing rents (Pledge 24); and
- 3.4.7 We have seen the prevalence of smoking in Swindon fall to below the English national average (Pledge 30).
- 3.5 In some cases government policy has changed, which made the original pledge obsolete. For example, the introduction of the apprenticeship levy by Whitehall means that Pledge 18 is no longer realistic.
- 3.6 As well as the existing pledges, we also have to take into account wider regional and national issues such as the creation of England's Economic Heartland and the country's decision to leave the European Union. Belonging to the EHH will

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provide a platform to bid for access to government funding to support improved road and rail links to Oxford and beyond as far as Cambridge and even Norwich. This would help secure our economic advantages as part of the country's wealth creating hub.

- 3.7 Performance targets that are associated with the pledges serve to energise the organisation. They assist us in building strong partnerships with the private sector, community groups, other parts of the public sector and all stakeholders. In addition, they allow us to evince to our residents the progress we are making.
- 3.8 Therefore, the major tasks of the administration for 2018/19 will be two-fold. First, we will update the Vision, Priorities, and Pledges. Members will have full opportunity to contribute to these through the Scrutiny process and eventual decision at Council. Second, we will expand delivery of the Vision, along with the Council's other strategies, in order to continue to serve the people of Swindon.

Continuing to deliver the Vision

- 3.9 There are a number of commitments under the current pledges where I am confident we will see visible results in this municipal year. We will:
- 3.9.1 Build more affordable homes (Pledge 7);
- 3.9.2 See the construction of the new pub as part of the district centre at Wichelstowe (Pledge 14);
- 3.9.3 Open the new Deanery and Great Western Secondary Schools (Pledge 15);
- 3.9.4 See the first Higher Education students at the University of Wales Trinity St David Centre at the Carriage Works (Pledge 19);
- 3.9.5 Receive the final planning application for the exciting North Star Village regional leisure destination (Pledge 22); and
- 3.9.6 Continue to provide early support to people in debt (Pledge 24).

Delivering through partnerships

- 3.10 Alongside this, we will still have to ensure that our statutory care services are provided. Swindon, like all similar authorities, faces immense demand-led pressure in children's safeguarding, adult social care, and caring for those with learning difficulties. Ensuring that we provide the necessary support and stay within our financial means remains an ongoing challenge.
- 3.11 In all these areas, success will depend as much on our ability to work with partners as well as how well the Council manages its own services. It will be essential for our success that we enhance our relationships with the police,

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schools, the hospital, the CCG, and the relevant charities and third sector groups in order to ensure that all residents are protected. An approach that assumes that the Council can do everything will not be successful.

Economic prosperity and sound public finance

- 3.12 Our geography and existing transport links are crucial to Swindon's economy. Already we are benefitting from the new IET rolling stock on Great Western and we await the reduced journey times to London and Cardiff that will come with the electrification of the service. We also expect to benefit from the opening of the Elizabeth Line, which will provide enhanced access to central and east London. Our challenge over the next year will be how we adopt our Vision and other strategies to take best advantages of these transport improvements.
- 3.13 Above all, we remain committed to support the Borough's thriving private sector economy, which provides over 80% of local jobs. I am delighted that so many local employers have become ambassadors for the area through Switch on to Swindon. Through their work, and the support of the local authority, I hope that we can do more to retain existing firms, to help them grow through identifying employment land. We will seek to attract new employers by providing all the facilities they need to attract and retain staff.
- 3.14 In order to support all the Council's activities, it will be vital to ensure the Council's financial stability. Thanks to the prudent management of the Council's finances since 2004, we are balancing the books year after year. We are keeping Council Tax one of the lowest of any unitary authority and lower than many of our neighbours.
- 3.15 The Swindon Programme is the Council's key policy tool that has enabled us to balance our books. It is enabling us to improve existing internal processes, or create new ones to ensure that the Council becomes even more efficient and effective. Many of these changes will not be visible to the public, but in some cases, this will entail a wholesale transformation of how teams and departments work. I am grateful to the commitment and professionalism of the Council's staff in embracing and enacting these changes.
- 3.16 I will not be delivering this alone, and I am delighted to have a strong Cabinet team, which combines fresh faces as well as experience. The Members will be:
- 3.16.1 Councillor Oliver Donachie, Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity;
- 3.16.2 Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Highways and the Environment;
- 3.16.3 Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Adults;
- 3.16.4 Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance;
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3.16.5 Councillor Mary Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment

3.16.6 Councillor Cathy Martyn, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety;

3.16.7 Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Town Centre;

3.16.8 Councillor Gary Sumner, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning; and

3.16.9 Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services.

3.17 The details of the portfolios is attached at Appendix 1.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 There are no alternative options; Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution requires the Leader to submit a report.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications in this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2 The report author has considered legal and human rights legislation in the preparation of this report. It is considered that the report's recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

5.3 The report author has considered whether any of the information contained in the report falls under the General Data Protection Regulations and has determined that the report does not contain personal data.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

5.4 There are no specific issues in this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

5.5 Since the report does not recommend any changes in services, no Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) was undertaken.

Risk Management

5.6 Risk Management will form part of any formal decisions made by Cabinet. There are no specific issues relating to this report.

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6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Executive Arrangements, 2018-2019 (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).