

**Report of Scrutiny and Overview Committees  
held between 25 October 2009 and 18 December 2009**

COUNCIL

Date 14 January 2009

**Purpose**

- To report issues considered by the Scrutiny Committee, the Health Scrutiny Committee and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees, between 25 October 2009 and 18 December 2009 and, where appropriate, to report on the outcome of their deliberations.

**Minutes for Confirmation and Recommendation**

- To note the proceedings of the Scrutiny Committee, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees held since the last meeting of the Council.
- There are no minutes of the Scrutiny Committee, Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committees requiring the confirmation of the Council.

**1. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****1.1 Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009:****a) Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2009.

**49. *Outcome of Pre-Statutory Consultation on school places in Highworth***

The Committee resolved:

- (1) That Minute 49 of the Cabinet be noted and accepted and that the Cabinet Member's assurances, that the feedback from parents and local residents as a result of the statutory consultation will be taken into consideration by the Cabinet Panel in reaching its decision, be welcomed.
- (2) That it be noted that the decision of the Cabinet Panel on this issue would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, providing Members with the opportunity to seek their own assurance that due consideration had been given to the views and opinions of local residents.
- (3) That it be noted that, in conjunction with the statutory consultation exercise, a detailed assessment would be made of traffic management in the area of the schools and safe routes for pupils travelling from Northview to Westrop would be identified.

**53. Active Swindon Strategy**

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Councillor Justin Tomlinson welcomed the report to Cabinet but referred to the importance to the Active Swindon Strategy of ensuring that adequate open space provision is made within new development in the town to accommodate physical activity away from the organised environment. He emphasised the important role to be played by the Group Director, Environment, Regeneration and Community in the development of the Active Swindon Strategy. The Group Director welcomed Councillor Tomlinson's comments and agreed that these would be taken on board in developing the strategy.

b) Cabinet Member Question and Answer session

Councillor Fionuala Foley was in attendance to respond to members' questions on issues within her portfolio of responsibility. The following issues were raised by members:

- the performance of the Capita Contract in relation to the customer services elements falling within the Cabinet Member's remit
- the transformation of the Council's Streetsmart Division and the excellent standard of service that was being provided
- the success of the plastic re-cycling service
- prosecutions for graffiti offences
- the Restorative Justice pilot scheme in West Swindon in partnership with the Police
- the Council's Section 215 powers to remove graffiti
- the effect of the Council's recycling strategy on the incidence of fly tipping
- the ability of the Council to require private owners to properly maintain the immediate environment of their property
- the refurbishment of the public conveniences in Victoria Road
- improvements made to the monthly reporting of complaints data to Senior Managers and Councillors and the availability of this information for members
- the removal of abandoned motor vehicles
- the success of the public forums held in advance of Cabinet Meetings
- the possibility of the Council offering a recycling service to schools and the possibility of including hospitals and businesses within local authorities' recycling schemes
- the promotion of the Council's cable stripping and recycling facility
- the Council's target of recycling more than 50% of household waste and measures that were being taken to both achieve and maintain this level of recycling
- the failure of the Council to implement its agreed practice of refusing to collect from bins that were filled beyond capacity (i.e. where the lid would not close)
- the Council's failure to implement recommendations of the Task Group established to review the provision of public conveniences in the town

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- Promise 23 and the likelihood that the final phase of the Shaw Park Forest would be completed on target

In the final part of the meeting, the Deputy Leader introduced the newly produced "Corporate Complaints Report", copies of which were tabled at the meeting. The report provided statistical information in relation to the volume of complaints received by the Council over the period September 2008 to September 2009, sorted by complaints received by each service directorate and by Capita and SCS. It was specifically noted that complaints received regarding streetsmart issues were included in the Environment, Regeneration and Community Directorate statistics. The Committee was also asked to note that whilst this report provided a corporate level perspective of complaints received, more detailed analyses would be available to Directors and Heads of Service to assist in the identification of problem areas.

The Committee resolved:

- (1) That it be noted that all cables deposited at the Waste Recycling Centre are separated and stripped and that the volumes involved keep the existing machinery operating at capacity. That the Head of Streetsmart pursue with SCS whether there was a business case to be made for the acquisition of a second cable-stripping device.
- (2) That it be noted that the Deputy Leader was hopeful that the 50% recycling target would be achieved once the Council had addressed the issue of additional wheelie bins previously provided for individual properties in West Swindon and this policy was subsequently applied throughout the Borough.
- (3) That it be noted that a contract had now been placed with Swindon Commercial Services for the refurbishment of the public conveniences in Victoria Road and that it was anticipated that the work would be completed in advance of the turning on of the Old Town Christmas Lights.
- (4) That the Deputy Leader be asked to reconsider the recommendations of the Task Group established to review the provision of public conveniences in the town and to report to a future meeting on how these might be appropriately progressed.
- (5) That it be noted that the new Corporate Complaints report would be regularly submitted to Cabinet for consideration and therefore Scrutiny Committee would also have the opportunity to consider the data.

## **1.2 Meeting of 23 November 2009:**

### **a) Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 18 November 2009.

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**59.     *Budget Strategy 2010/2011 – 2013/14***

Councillor Mark Edwards, the Cabinet Member for Resources, was in attendance and responded to members' questions on a number of issues concerning the Council's current and projected budgetary position. Councillor Edwards advised that the identified budget gap was not the result of poor management but the result of years of under funding by Central Government, a situation that had been exacerbated due to the recession and consequent increasing costs and reduced income. Councillor Edwards added that Swindon did not receive a great deal from the Government funding formula and, with increasing demographic and other pressures on the budget, he did not anticipate that the situation would get any easier. However, he advised the meeting that, despite the budgetary position, he was confident that the Council would deliver a fair and affordable Council Tax rate for the people of Swindon.

The following matters were raised by members during their consideration of Cabinet Minute 59:

- the validity of some of the cost projections detailed in the report
- the level of debt charges resulting from a reduced Capital Programme
- the cost of "other inflation" of £10.6m and the 1.2% increase in staff pay
- the projected reduction in the Council Tax base
- the projected rate of recovery of Council Tax payments
- the administration's medium term resourcing plan and the Cabinet Member's confidence that the Council would be able to deliver a fair and affordable Council Tax
- the financial implications and liability of the Council in relation to the Borough-wide Internet Project
  - the timeframe for the project
- the growing cost of Adult Social Care provision
  - the reasons behind the significant overspend in recent years in Social Services.
- the changing demographic of the borough and the use of Housing Associations and Housing Corporation Funding to off set the direct cost to the Council of the provision of residential care
- the major impact on the Adult Social Care Budget as the result of the provision of care packages for only a few individuals
- the Council's approach to addressing the identified budget gap
- transformational change and the New Ways of Working

The Committee resolved that Minute 59 of the Cabinet be accepted.

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*Minute 60 – Single Status*

Councillor Keith Williams, the Cabinet Member for Leisure & Corporate Services, was in attendance and responded to members' questions on a number of issues concerning Swindon Single Status.

Councillor Williams advised that, under Single Status, 23% of staff would see a reduction in their pay, 20% would see an increase and the remainder would remain the same. He agreed that, obviously, some people would be upset with the results of the Single Status project but he felt it was a necessary measure that had been introduced fairly and would result in a scheme that was equality proofed and would see a significant reduction in the differential in pay grade between male and female members of staff.

The following matters were raised by members during their consideration of Cabinet Minute 60:

- the reasons for not solely using that the NJC Pay Line, the unions' preferred option
- the Council's decision to move away from national agreements
- the percentage of staff represented by Unions and measures to ensure that the views of non-union represented employees had been sought as part of the consultation process
- the cost of Single Status for schools and whether schools would be able to opt out of the arrangements
- the availability of the TMS Report for inspection by members
- the likely impact of Single Status on employee relations
- the lack of any Government support for employees who were detrimentally affected by Single Status
- the appeals process and the situation of employees detrimentally affected by Single Status who might refuse to sign a new contract of employment
- the Council's commitment to protecting pay levels of employees detrimentally affected by Single Status until April 2011
- Pension and Redundancy Protection

The Committee resolved that Minute 60 of the Cabinet be accepted and that copies of the full TMS report be made available to Scrutiny Committee Members on request.

*Minute 61- School Organisation – Primary School Places*

In response to a comment by the Chair, that the proposals might lead to continued teaching in temporary buildings, in contravention of the Swindon 2010 Promise, Councillor Perkins responded that the Promise related to the removal of all unsuitable temporary buildings by the end of 2010 and that, in fact, of these, some 97% had

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already been removed. He acknowledged that some temporary buildings in use at the moment, such as those at Oakhurst, but these were of a high standard, representing a valuable resource for the schools concerned, and would continue to be used until permanent accommodation could be provided.

In response to a question by Councillors Eric Shaw regarding the provision of an additional two temporary buildings at Croft, Councillor Perkins advised that it had been anticipated that the demand for places in the Old Town area in advance of the completion of East Wichel would be met by Central schools but that, due to the influx of new families into the Central area and a higher than anticipated number of primary aged children, there was no longer the surplus capacity in the Central area and this situation had necessitated the provision of the temporary buildings at Croft.

Councillor Justin Tomlinson commented on factors which had detrimentally affected the Council's ability to accurately forecast school admission figures, particularly in relation to the high occupancy of new built properties by young families with primary school aged children which he felt had resulted in an increase in the number of primary school places that would be required. Councillor Perkins agreed that the prediction formula might have to be changed to address the changing demographic.

The Committee resolved that Minute 61 of the Cabinet be accepted.

b) Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Councillor Peter Greenhalgh, Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Transport and Strategic Planning was in attendance to respond to members' questions on issues within his portfolio of responsibility. The following issues were raised by members:

- the reasons for the current "red" status of Promise 44 ("We will complete the Swindon Urban Cycle Network and introduce secure parking facilities for cycles at key points") and measures being taken to ensure the delivery of this promise
- the contributory factors behind the current "red" status of Promise 50a ("Through better safety initiatives on the roads we control, we will reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads by 40%") and measures being taken to deliver against this promise
- the analysis local road safety data following the removal of speed cameras
- the level of former "speed camera" financial resources and the "refocusing" of these resources to deliver new road safety initiatives
- the possibility of introducing a pedestrian "signalised" crossing as part of the Drove Road safety improvements
- the need for improvements to road signage across the borough, particularly in the rural areas
- the Eastern Development Area Land Use Plan

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- the strategic importance to Swindon of the Meads Way Relief Road and the need to continue to make the case to Central Government for its provision
- the current status of the Bruce Street Bridge re-design work

The Chair thanked Councillor Greenhalgh for attending the meeting and for his full and open responses to Members' questions on service areas and issues within his portfolio of responsibility.

**1.3 Meeting of 14 December 2009:****a) Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 9 December 2009.

**65. *Revenue Budget Management 2009/10***

At the invitation of the Chair, the Cabinet Member outlined the reasons for the Council's difficult financial position, its continuing under-funding by central government and a significant reduction in income due to the current economic situation at a time when expenditure levels were increasing. He confirmed that the budget was under constant scrutiny and that the process for managing the budget was working very effectively. The Leader of the Council commented that there was not a £12m overspend, as the Chair indicated, but, rather, this was an ongoing budget gap resulting from the cost pressures that included inflation, pay settlements, and additional contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

**66. *Capital Programme Monitoring***

In response to a question by Councillor Des Moffatt, regarding the Council's investment portfolio, the Director of Finance advised that, currently, the Council was a "net holder" of assets. In response to a further point by Councillor Moffatt, the Director of Finance confirmed that decisions regarding investments were made in accordance with the Council's treasury management policy.

The Chair asked for some further detail on the projected additional income for the Council through the use of its assets for advertising and through greater use of its leisure assets. Councillor Keith Williams explained that an increase in revenue of at least £144,000 was anticipated as a result of work with an external agency to develop ways in which the Council might increase usage of its leisure facilities. It was agreed that a written response be provided regarding the potential increase in revenue through utilising the Council's assets for advertising purposes.

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Councillor Nick Martin raised the issue of projected savings in relation to street lighting and highlighted the potential danger of removing street lighting in areas where there are no footways or cycle paths, suggesting that some sections of these roads were still used by pedestrians and that they may be put at risk by this proposal. Councillor Peter Greenhalgh responded that pedestrians should not be walking along the carriageway and that it was difficult to legislate for that kind of behaviour. He continued, briefly summarising the anticipated savings in the initial year following removal and projected savings thereafter. He confirmed that under no circumstances would street lighting be turned off in areas where there was a potential safety risk.

In response to comments by members, the Leader of the Council agreed that written responses be provided regarding the Cabinet decision to remove provision within the budget for the evening cleaning of the town centre. He also agreed that the Chair be briefed at the earliest opportunity on proposals to relocate the Registry Office within the Civic Office complex.

Councillor Glenn Smith referred to the increasing level of Landfill Tax and asked whether this might be reduced as a result of the Councils recycling efforts. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Landfill Tax level was increasing year on year but it had to be recognised that the Borough was continuing to grow. She added that the recycling rate was also growing, up to around 48% at present, and that work would continue to improve recycling rates and to reduce the amount of landfill that was necessary.

Councillor Smith asked whether the introduction of a charge for staff and school governors for the Swindoncard had seen a decrease in the uptake of the cards. Councillor Keith Williams responded that there had been a slight decline but this seemed to relate mainly to individuals who did not actually use their Swindoncard.

Councillor Stan Pajak referred to a study by Capita of the issue of transport for schools and suggested that cuts in special schools transport might provide savings that could be used to fund Dial-a-Ride and that it might even be possible to utilise the Dial-a-Ride service for the provision of some special school transport needs. Councillor Garry Perkins confirmed that a study was being undertaken of schools transport to provide better value for money, including the possibility of utilising different transport providers, and that a report on the outcome of the study would be submitted to Cabinet in the near future, in advance of the budget being set for 2010/11.

*69. Annual Performance Assessment of Adult Social Care 2008/2009*

In response to a question by the Chair regarding the cost effectiveness of the Council's Adult Care Services, Councillor David Renard, the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care, replied that he felt the service was cost effective. However, he emphasised that there was a growing demand for services and



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agreed with the Inspectors' report that there were areas that required further transformation. The Chair asked if the overall rating would have been achieved without the identified overspend. Councillor Renard acknowledged that there had been an overspend on that years budget for Adult Social Care but commented that the Council did not receive enough funding from central government to meet the increase in demand for services and that balancing this budget would remain a problem for some years to come. He felt it had been necessary for the Council to commit this level of funding to Adult Social Care to achieve the assessment rating that it had, the service having improved "from being one of the worst in the country to become the third best in the region".

*75. Final Business Case For The Creation Of Swindon Commercial Services As An Arms Length Company*

In response to a question by Councillor Des Moffatt regarding the monitoring of the performance of SCS as an arms length company, and the suggestion that quarterly progress reports be made to the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the main Opposition Party, the Director of Law and Democratic Services agreed to raise the matter of the reporting arrangements with SCS to ensure that an appropriate framework of accountability is set out in the memorandum of understanding and supporting documentation between the Council and SCS.

The Committee resolved:

- (1) The minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 be accepted.
  - (2) That the Leader of the Council provide a written response, to be copied to all members of the Scrutiny, on the potential increase in revenue through utilising the Council's assets for advertising purposes.
  - (3) That the Leader of the Council provide a written response, to be copied to all members of the Scrutiny, regarding the Cabinet decision to remove provision within the budget for the evening cleaning of the town centre.
  - (4) That a briefing be arranged for the Chair of Scrutiny Committee, at the earliest opportunity, on proposals to relocate the Registry Office within the Civic Office complex.
- b) Provision of a Loan to Digital City (UK) Limited for the purposes of Establishing a Wi Fi Network across the Borough of Swindon

The Chair referred to concerns that he had, and that had been expressed to him, regarding the proposed Wi-Fi network, particularly in relation to the process by which the decision to proceed had been reached and whether the Council's decision making protocol had been adhered to. He was concerned that the Scrutiny Committee or, indeed, anyone other than Cabinet members had been consulted regarding the

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proposal and sought confirmation that the decision to proceed had been made under appropriate delegated authority.

Councillor Rod Bluh, the Leader of the Council, responded that, in the current economic climate, the Council had to be prepared to pursue this type of commercial investment to secure new revenue streams. He commented that the current funding model for local authorities was not sustainable and that other models of funding had to be explored if the Council was to avoid insolvency and continue to provide quality services for its residents. Councillor Bluh felt that it was essential that the Council investigated commercial opportunities as they arose and that such decisions had to be made within a realistic commercial setting. He confirmed that the decision to proceed with this scheme had been made by officers under delegated authority, as authorised at the Cabinet Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008.

The Chair maintained that most councillors had been unaware of this decision before the recent announcement of the implementation of the scheme and he felt that the use of £450,000 of public money in support of a deal with the private sector presented a significant risk. He asked whether it was appropriate that this matter had not been debated by a larger forum of Councillors. The Leader of the Council concurred that any commercial venture generally involved some level of risk, however, he maintained that the business case presented by Digital City had been thoroughly investigated and discussed and it had ultimately been determined to be a sound commercial venture and one that addressed other priorities, including social inclusion. The Leader of the Council assured the meeting that the decision had been made in accordance with Council policy and that consideration had been given to the level of consultation that might be undertaken in respect of the proposal but it was felt that the issue was one of competitive advantage, to make money for the taxpayers of Swindon, and that debate of the matter in a open forum would have increased the commercial risk.

The Chair invited members to put questions to the Leader of the Council, and the other Cabinet Members present, on the issue of the loan to Digital City (UK) Limited for the purposes of establishing a Wi-Fi network across the borough. Topics raised by members included:

- the failure of a similar scheme in Norwich
- the concept of partnerships between a local authority and a private sector companies
- the possibility of entering into an agreement for the provision of a wi-fi network with partners other than Digital City
- the decision of Cabinet at his meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008 as the authority for entering into an agreement with Digital City
- the role and responsibility of the Council's Section 151 officer to re-invest the Councils surpluses in risk free investments

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- the role of the Performance Advisory Group and whether it should have been consulted regarding the Wi-Fi network proposal
- the unique nature of this proposal, the officers' analysis of the business case, and their confidence that the projected business levels would be met
- the reasons for not pursuing an earlier approach made by BT regarding a similar scheme
- the accommodation offered to Digital City and the assessment that this accommodation was "of no commercial value"
- data available regarding the take-up of a Wi-Fi scheme in Glastonbury and the validity of extrapolating that data to provide a comparative assessment of Digital City's business case
- the launch of the project in Highworth and the second phase "role out" in Central area
- broadband access as a major political issue and recognition of the importance of broadband accessibility for businesses in the South West Region
- the Government's "Digital Britain" imperative and the delivery of broadband access before its target of 2017
- the Council's investment in this scheme and people's concern that budgets elsewhere were having to be reduced to accommodate that investment
- Digital City as a new business entity and its experience of this kind of commercial venture

The Leader of the Council concluded the debate by commenting that he had no hesitation in saying that this action was being taken wholly in the interests of the Council and the residents of the Borough. He acknowledged that the decision to proceed was a "judgement call" by himself and the Cabinet and that it was Scrutiny's role to determine whether or not they had acted appropriately and within their delegated authority. Whilst he recognised members' concerns about the level of information made available to them regarding this venture, he hoped they would recognise that this had proven essential in order to maintain the commercial viability of the proposal.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and the other Cabinet Members present, for their comments. The Director of Law and Democratic Services asked the Committee to confirm whether, having considered the matter, it was satisfied that due process had been followed by the Cabinet in reaching its decision to enter into a partnership agreement with Digital City (UK) Limited for the purposes of establishing a Wi-Fi network across the Borough of Swindon.

The Committee resolved that it was satisfied that due process has been followed by the Council in reaching the decision to enter into a partnership agreement with Digital City (UK) Limited for the purposes of establishing a Wi-Fi network across the Borough of Swindon.

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(Councillors Derique Montaut and Des Moffatt asked that their vote against the above Resolution be recorded in the Minutes).

c) Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care was in attendance and responded to members' questions on issues within his portfolio of responsibility. The following issues were raised by members:

- the Maple Court Extracare facility and progress with the Council's programme for the modernisation of its care homes
- the Whitbourne specialist centre for dementia and proposals to turn Fessey House into a second dementia care facility
- the development of the Hawthorns Respite Care Centre and possibilities the development of the remainder of that site
- the commissioning of Dial-A-Ride and other transport service providers by Adult Social Care and the impact of a reduced Dial-A-Ride service on the continuing viability of the Council's drop-in centres
- the impact of the economic recession on the continuing viability of Enterprise Works
  - Energy II Supported Work Programme
- improvements in Adult Social Care and the effect of the positive result of the Government Inspection on staff morale
- the current status of Promise 42 ("We will create opportunities for low cost home ownership by building an average of 300 affordable homes each year. Priority will be given to Swindon's key workers and local residents and we will also encourage shared equity schemes") and the likelihood that this promise will be achieved within the given time period

The Chair thanked Councillor Renard for attending the meeting and for his full and open responses to Members' questions on service areas and issues within his portfolio of responsibility.

## **2. HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **2.1 Meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

a) The need for radiotherapy services for the Swindon population

The Committee received a report setting out the need for radiotherapy services in Swindon and the next steps necessary to meet that need. It was noted that cancer patients from Swindon currently had to travel to Oxford to receive their radiotherapy treatment and the main concern was to reduce this travelling time. Initial research

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indicated that the projected requirements of the catchment population for Swindon would justify establishing two linear accelerator machines here. Two machines would allow for routine maintenance down time but there was spare capacity within the area should there be any breakdowns or longer periods of maintenance required. However, there was a great deal of further research needed before a decision could be made on whether to proceed.

The Committee noted the report and gave its full support to the project, requesting that the PCT provide further reports as the project progressed.

b) Presentation on the Swindon PCT Strategic Refresh

The Committee received a presentation on the Swindon PCT Strategic Refresh. The presentation explained the steps taken and the principles involved in establishing a framework for determining priorities in the move towards greater integration of services and a more streamlined service provision.

c) Tuberculosis Services

The Committee received a report on the proposal to introduce a community based tuberculosis service in Swindon. It was noted that the number of cases in the town had doubled over the last five years so it was proposed to develop a service, alongside the hospital, to raise awareness and provide information on the disease. Many of those suffering from TB were recent immigrants, which was why a screening process would form part of the new service. Reference was made to the Cardiff arrangement for providing a service to those who found it difficult to take their medication regularly. However details of the arrangement were not known and it was agreed that further information would be ascertained and forwarded to the Scrutiny Officer.

The Committee endorsed and welcomed the improvement to the tuberculosis service noted that future changes to commissioned services as part of the transforming community services programme would be the subject of impact assessments to the Health Committee to determine whether the change constituted a substantial variation in service.

d) Urgent Care Services

The Committee received a report to provide an update on progress of the Urgent Care Programme of work. The Committee welcomed the update and noted that there had been a great deal of progress since the last report. Reference was made to the development of a single contact point through which appropriate care would be co-ordinated and people directed to the appropriate service. This facility was to be phased in and the Committee was advised that the process had already started.

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e) Swindon Dementia Strategy and Delivery Plan

The Committee received a report on the plans to address the National Dementia Strategy. Members noted and endorsed the report, particularly the effectiveness of both the arrangements for the early diagnosis of dementia and the support provided.

f) Dignity in Care Task Group Update

The Committee received an interim report on the work being undertaken by the Dignity in Care Task Group. Councillor Michael Bray, Chair of the Task Group, advised that the visit to the Great Western Hospital on 13 November had been very useful. It was noted that visits to care homes would continue through November and December and an invitation to visit the Victoria Centre was extended to the Task Group Group at the meeting. It was noted that a final report would be submitted to this Committee in February 2010.

### **3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no meetings of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee during this period.

### **4. ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

#### **4.1 Meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

##### Review of the Arts Centre Task Group

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development, the Culture Programming Manager and the Culture Marketing Manager updated Members of this Committee on the current performance of the Arts Centre, including information about the proposal to move the Old Town Library into the Arts Centre, information about the consultant's review of the Arts Centre, including current and future marketing plans, and how the Arts Centre fits into the overall culture plans for Swindon.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development outlined the proposals to close the existing Old Town library facility and to put it into the Arts Centre, creating a cultural hub for Old Town. A Capital bid had been submitted for the work as investment would be required and it was intended to start work in the new financial year, should the capital bid be successful. This would result in an improved service, larger floor area for various activities with new facilities including a café. Members of the Committee felt that it was important that work started soon as there was a sense of expectation in Old Town and the existing facility was not fit for

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purpose.

With regards to the Arts Centre itself, the executive summary of the consultants review was currently being written and the recommendations included:-

- Creating new day-time usage.
- Implementing on-line booking facilities
- A refreshment of the programme
- Integration of a café

The Culture Programming Manager confirmed that staff work across the Cultural Service in Swindon and that the best estimate of running the Arts Centre was approximately £200K with no budget increase anticipated in 2010/11. It was confirmed that a major benefit would be the introduction of on-line booking and it was hoped that this would be up and running within the first three months of 2010. Other initiatives included a re-vamped brochure, e-bulletins, using facebook and extending the opening hours of the box office.

The Arts Centre was not a commercial concern and it was important to provide a diverse programme of activities, especially where it was of benefit to the local communities. Members of the Committee felt that it was important to balance the range of activities between those that attracted large audiences and those that were of perceived benefit to the community, but with a smaller potential audience. It was not always possible to compete with other commercial venues, such as the cinemas, and the Council had a duty to promote its cultural strategy and therefore has to provide services and events that other venues don't provide.

Concern regarding the proposed establishment of a café was expressed by some Members of the Committee, especially its financial viability, bearing in mind the number of other cafes within the vicinity of the Arts Centre and the Cabinet Member for Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development was keen to learn from the experiences of other colleagues within the council who had worked in similar establishments.

The Chair expressed some concern about the low numbers of people who actually attend events at the Arts Centre and at the number of residents within his ward who were unaware of the existence of this venue. The Cabinet Member for Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development agreed that it may be possible to look at a more commercially focussed programme for the Arts Centre and that he would be keen to take this debate to a wider audience.

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**4.2 Meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009****Town Centre Regeneration**

Nick Condor (Public Realm, New Swindon Company) presented the regeneration plans for Regent Street to Members of this Committee. These improvement works were being project managed by the New Swindon Company and were part funded by the Government's Growth Point Funds as well as additional funding from the South West Regional Development Agency. He explained that this was a brand new design and that the paving used would be the same as that used at Canal Wharf for which local suppliers were used. The sandstone used was pre-cured and pre-treated as it came out of the quarry and was the best product for protecting against damage caused by chewing gum. This would be a five year protected asset and utilities would only be able to dig the paving up for emergencies within this period, otherwise penalties would be incurred.

It was felt that it would be useful to have better signage outlining what was happening in the area. Nick Condor agreed to take this in board but advised that there were health and safety issues around where these signs were placed and that some shop keepers were reluctant to have any signage hiding their shop fronts.

As part of the regeneration plans, information would be provided about the history of the area, including information about the trams that were used and that work was ongoing with a gateway artist to provide some modern art in the area. It was also hoped that, by making improvements to the area, this would have a knock on effect to other organisations improving their buildings and Nationwide had already expressed an interest in participating in these plans.

The Director of Economic and Cultural Development advised that Cabinet had agreed to a merger taking place between New Swindon Company and the Economic Development Team and that this merger would provide a much more effective and holistic approach to the regeneration of Swindon. There was a more integrated and aggressive marketing message being put to potential developers and investors that Swindon was ready for regeneration when the economic climate improved and that Swindon did have a good reputation in its approach towards planning. The Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Transport and Strategic Planning added that it was important for the Council and New Swindon Company to act as enablers for any potential investors or developers and that they were working closely with the private sector to encourage development in Swindon. Talks were ongoing with some high profile restaurateurs about coming to Swindon and there was also potential to have boutique style shops in the town. It was important for Swindon to have its own feel and look and that people's aspirations of Swindon were lifted. Consideration was also been given to the road and attraction signage and the Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Transport and Strategic Planning advised that he would be more than



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happy to discuss this further with Councillors.

The nature of retailing had changed over the years and it was important to aim towards economic sustainability whilst acknowledging that funding was a major issue for all towns. Swindon's profile had been raised with projects such as Wi-Fi and twinning with Disney World and that this was good news for any property developers wishing to bring business into the town.

## **5. SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **5.1 Meeting of 3rd December 2009**

#### **a) Swindon Wiltshire Alcohol and Drug Service**

Bill Carlton, Swindon Wiltshire Alcohol and Drug Service (SWADS) gave a presentation on the background to the formation and of the current work and projects undertaken by SWADS.

He referred to the Open Access Assessments Clinics and Support Groups, the Structured Day Programme, the affects of Psychological and Physical dependencies on Alcohol, Community Detoxification, Intervention Clinics for people drinking hazardously, Aftercare facilities including Arts and Recording Studios, and Project PASH

He answered questions and points of information raised by members of the Committee on the following topics:

- Financial Funding of SWADS
- The age groups using the SWADS service
- Sharing information with the Great Western Hospital (GWH), Safer Communities Partnership and Drug Reference Groups
- The interaction between drug and alcohol users
- The potential problems of selling alcohol at Council-run events
- The pricing of alcohol
- Binge-drinking
- Underage drinking
- Referrals from GP's
- The numbers of SWADS service users
- Licensing Issues
- Whether SWADS opening hours were user-friendly
- The consequences of taking the drug 'Anti-abuse'
- Promoting education of safe sensible drinking

#### **b) Alcohol – Licensing**

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Lionel Starling, the Council's Licensing Manager, gave a presentation concerning the link between Licensing and alcohol and the current practices that are in place in Swindon. He advised the Committee on the following matters:

- Meeting with Planning Officers to discuss the density of pubs in the Fleet Street area.
- Banning Orders
- Publicity campaigns highlighting the dangers of drinking to excess
- The urban myth of drink-spiking
- Plastic glasses only policy
- Proposals being considered for the Town Centre regeneration
- Taxing bad behaviour
- How the concentration of bars and pubs in one area can affect extended opening hours
- The restriction of availability of alcohol
- The importance of seating in bars and pubs.

c) Alcohol – Update on Events

Matthew Hibbert, the Strategic Development Manager for Substance Misuse gave a presentation on events that have taken place relating to alcohol and answered questions by members of the Committee about the work of the Community Safety department and the budget for commissioning treatment services. He referred to work undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership highlighting work carried out in relation to Alcohol Awareness, working with the Police and the Nighttime Economy. He provided feedback on the Alcohol Big Debate Event, and the initiatives taken as result, including: a follow up event scheduled for February 2010, the alcohol harm reduction strategy and this Committees role in developing a new strategy.

The Committee agreed to setting up a Binge Drinking/Youth Drinking Task Group with the Children's Overview Committee and invited the Licensing Committee to set up a joint Task Group to conduct a review of licensing topics.

Members of the Committee also agreed to attend visits to the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Great Western Hospital and to accompany the Police.

### **Background Papers and Information**

- Reports for all Scrutiny and Overview Committees and the related Minutes are available in full on the Committee and Member Information Pages of the Council's Intranet and Website ([www.swindon.gov.uk](http://www.swindon.gov.uk)) or on request from Committee and Member Services.