

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 15 APRIL 2013

PRESENT:- Councillors Kevin Small (Chair), Peter Heaton-Jones (Vice-Chair), Toby Elliott, Brian Ford, Des Moffatt, Maureen Penny and Robert Wright

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, was in attendance.

68. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

69. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

70. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

71. Question and Answer - Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities, and Housing

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities, and Housing, was in attendance and presented a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of the various service areas within his portfolio of responsibility and providing an assessment of what he felt had been done well, what might have been done differently and the challenges facing the portfolio over the next year.

Following his presentation of his report, Councillor Holland responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following topics:

- tenant engagement and measures to increase the involvement of less active tenants
 - the role of the Housing Participation officer
 - the Tenant Academy
 - the tenant consultation policy and the importance of a structured tenant consultation mechanism
- the challenge of the consultation to be undertaken in relation to the proposed rent increase
- the role of Swindon Tenants Voice and the Tenants Association for Sheltered Housing as the key conduits for engagement between the Council and its tenants and the Council's monitoring of the effectiveness of tenants' organisations in advocating the majority view of tenants
- the impact of the retail regeneration of an area, particularly in relation to increased rents payable for retail outlets and the consequent increases in consumer goods' prices

- the failure to consult ward members regarding the proposed regeneration of Bourne Road
- regeneration and the necessary “trade-offs” between the provision of cheaper retail outlets and the enhancement of community facilities
- rural affairs initiatives
 - problems encountered in relation to the rural areas of the borough
 - the relationship between the Council and Parish Councils
- the joint response of the Council and partner organisations to reducing domestic violence and the importance of adopting an holistic approach to resolve the problem
 - the specific and important role of housing services in reducing domestic violence
- “One Swindon” and engagement with ward members
- homelessness and the Council’s funding of the Threshold Housing Link
- the extent of the Councils housing waiting list and actions that might be taken to reduce the numbers on the waiting list
- Housing Services’ Performance monitoring
 - the percentage of urgent repairs not completed within one day and the reasons for such non-completion
 - the criteria for the categorisation of repairs as “urgent” and the tenant’s ability to appeal a categorisation of “non-urgent”
- tenant satisfaction with the Council’s repairs service and the process for review of non-satisfactory performance issues
- welfare reform and the possibility of rooms within the Council’s housing stock, currently designated as bedrooms, being re-designated as other rooms due to their size
 - the spare room subsidy and the criteria for assistance
- anti-social behaviour as a major source of complaints
 - the recording of anti-social behaviour complaints by the Police and by the Council and the correlation between police statistics and the Council’s own statistical data
- the effectiveness of the localities’ principles in developing cross-boundary community networks and facilitating borough-wide community responses to issues that impact on all Swindon borough residents
- the recently revised Cabinet Member portfolios and the Cabinet Member’s view of the manageability of the housing portfolio alongside other significant areas of responsibility
- fuel poverty and photovoltaic schemes

It was agreed that information requested by members during the course of the Committee’s consideration of this item be forwarded to members via the Committee Clerk.

Resolved – That Councillor Holland be thanked for attending the meeting and for his full and open responses to members’ questions.

72. Review of 2012-13

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services regarding the production of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny report for 2012/13 and, in order to place the Annual Report in context, inviting members to consider the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the Municipal Year and to highlight

those reviews that they thought had been successful and also those reviews that might have had less positive outcomes. The Committee also received an oral report by Councillor Toby Elliott, in his capacity as the Chair of the Committee's Localities Sub-Committee, on the work done by the Task Group during the year, including the production of a comprehensive member questionnaire, completed by a high percentage of members, on their views of the Locality process and its future, and the possible future role of the Task Group.

Resolved – (1) That the Chair, in liaison with the Scrutiny Officer, be authorised to prepare the Annual Overview and Scrutiny report 2012/13 for submission to the Council.

(2) That it be noted that the final report of the Committee's Task Group to review the finalised accounts of Digital City (UK) Ltd would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration in the new Municipal Year.