

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 17 JUNE 2013**

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Kevin Small (Chair), Andrew Bennett, John Ballman, Michael Dickinson (Vice-Chair), Emma Faramarzi, Brian Ford, Mary Friend, Colin Lovell, Cindy Matthews, Des Moffatt, Maureen Penny, Stan Pajak and Robert Wright

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, and Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, Mike Bawden, Cabinet Member for Strategic Projects and Transformation, Claire Ellis, Cabinet Member for Customer Support and Corporate Services, Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, Richard Hurley, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Housing and Streetsmart (Delivery), Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, and Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways, Strategic Transport and Leisure, were in attendance.

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

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

### **2. Public Question Time**

Roger Ogle, editor of the Link Magazine and a director of Swindon Viewpoint, put a question regarding the Cabinet decision to establish Create Studios as an independent company limited by guarantee with charitable status. The Chair thanked Mr Ogle for his question and assured him that his concern would be raised with the Cabinet member when the Committee considered the matter at Agenda Item No. 5.

Mr Brian Cockbill, a local resident, put a number of "follow up" questions to a series of questions he had previously put to Cabinet regarding Stratton St. Margaret Parish, particularly in relation to the Stratton precept, the likely impact on Stratton St. Margaret of the establishment of a Nythe Parish and the possibility of sharing of business rates with other town and parish councils. Mr Cockbill also remarked that a promised report to Council on the issue of the parish precept remained outstanding. Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to Mr Cockbill's questions at the meeting and, in response to a request by Mr. Cockbill, also agreed to provide a written summary of his answers. On the matter of the allegedly overdue report, Councillor Renard agreed to look into the matter.

Mr Cockbill then put a further number of "follow up" questions to other questions he had previously put to Cabinet, these regarding the Bus Strategy and, in particular, the Number 21 bus service. Councillor Keith Williams, the Cabinet Member for Highways, Strategic Transport and Leisure, responded to Mr. Cockbill's questions at the meeting and also agreed to provide a written summary of his answers.

### **3. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013 be confirmed and signed.

#### **4. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions**

##### **A. Meeting of the Cabinet held on 12 July 2013**

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 12 July 2013.

##### **7. *Discretionary Housing Payments - Housing Revenue Account (HRA)***

Councillor Richard Hurley, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Housing and Streetsmart (Delivery), supported by the Council's Head of Housing Services, responded to questions put by Councillor Des Moffatt regarding the use of Housing Revenue Account funding to support an extended Discretionary Housing Payments policy and the introduction by the Government of the "bedroom tax" to address the issue of under-occupancy of properties.

Resolved – That Minute 7 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### **8. *Adult Community Learning Plan (Minute for Confirmation)***

Resolved – That Minute 8 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### **9. *Budget Management 2012/13***

Councillor Garry Perkins, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to comments by Councillor Bob Wright regarding potential savings resulting from the Cabinet's decision in relation to the future of the Create Studios (Cabinet Minute 14 refers).

Resolved – That Minute 9 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### **10. *Treasury and Capital Update (Minute for Confirmation)***

Resolved – That Minute 10 of the Cabinet be noted.

##### **11. *Secondary School Places***

Resolved – That Minute 11 of the Cabinet be noted

##### **12. *Towards a local Bus Strategy***

Councillor Keith Williams, the Cabinet Member for Highways, Strategic Transport and Leisure, responded to questions put by Councillors Brian Ford and Andrew Bennett regarding the severity of the impact of the bus strategy on rural areas, by comparison with other parts of the borough, and the adequacy of the consultation and research used to underpin the development of the strategy, particularly in relation to the rural services.

Councillor Williams also responded to concerns raised by Councillor Bob Wright regarding the cost effective use of Section 106 funding to facilitate sustainable public transport for new residential or industrial development and the correlation between the bus strategy and the Council's objective of finding new ways to reduce vulnerability and improve health for all.

Resolved – That Minute 12 of the Cabinet be noted

*13. Creation of third sector advice and information hub*

Resolved – That Minute 13 of the Cabinet be noted

*14. Leisure and Culture Change Programme – Create Studios*

Councillor Garry Perkins, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to questions put by the Chair, on behalf of Mr Roger Ogle (Minute 2 above refers), and Councillors Cindy Matthews, Bob Wright and Stan Pajak regarding:

- Create Studio's position within the Council and the reasons for the absence of any consultation on the proposed transfer arrangements
- the media services offered by Create Studios and the use of public funding to subsidise the proposed new company
- the opportunity for the consideration of alternative proposals from other community media organisations, including Swindon Viewpoint, for the enhancement of media services and the achievement of cost savings

A motion put by Councillor Des Moffatt, that Minute 14 be referred back to the Council on the basis of inadequate consultation, was put to the vote but was not carried.

Resolved – That Minute 14 of the Cabinet be noted

*15. The role of Forward Swindon Ltd Shareholder Commissioning Panel*

Councillor Garry Perkins, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to comments made by Councillor Des Moffatt regarding his concerns about the efficacy of the proposed changes to the governance structure of Forward Swindon Limited and, specifically, the arrangements in place to monitor and review the authorisation of expenditure in the commissioning of FSL projects.

Resolved – That Minute 15 of the Cabinet be noted

*16. Development Opportunity for Greenbridge, Swindon*

Resolved – That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the Committee's discussion of the matters referred to in Cabinet Minute 16 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned.

Councillor Garry Perkins, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, supported by the Board Director Resources, responded to members' specific questions on the detail of the proposed development opportunity.

Resolved – That Minute 16 of the Cabinet be noted.

B. Meeting of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions made at the meeting of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013.

*5. Proposal for the permanent expansion of Orchid Vale Primary School*

Resolved – That Minute 5 of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation be noted.

*6. Proposal for the permanent expansion of the Chalet Special School*

Resolved – That Minute 6 of the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation be noted.

In accordance with the National Code of Local Government Conduct, Councillor Michael Dickinson made a personal pecuniary declaration of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 8 ("Adult Community Learning Plan") for reasons of his employment.

**5. Leader of the Council: Annual Report**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, attended this first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the Municipal Year 2013/14 to report to the Committee on (a) the Council's performance in 2012/13, particularly in relation to delivery against the Administration's specific priorities and targets, and (b) the Cabinet's plans and priorities for 2013/14 and beyond.

Councillor Renard introduced his report, placing it in the context of a continuing challenging economic and financial situation and summarising outcomes in 2012/13 and priorities for the year ahead in relation to the "Stronger Together" organisational framework and each of the following five priorities of the Council:

- Right skills, right jobs in the right places,
- Work with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods,
- Make the best use of Swindon's resources inside and outside the Council,
- Together, find new ways to reduce vulnerability and improve health for all,
- Work with people and families to help them fulfil their potential.

In particular, Councillor Renard referred to the emphasis that the Council, under his leadership, would place on the rights and responsibilities of all residents of the

borough in contributing to their local community and to the quality of life in the borough as a whole. He endorsed the focussing of limited resources where they were most needed, protecting the most vulnerable people in society, whilst also recognising that this would reduce the opportunities for the provision and enhancement of more universal services. Councillor Renard felt that it was fair that people be asked to become more involved in community support services and that it was not unreasonable to expect that they should take more responsibility for keeping residential and public areas clean and tidy. He commented that, in moving forward and successfully addressing Council objectives, there was a significant role and responsibility for partners and local businesses in both protecting jobs and creating new jobs, and for Councillors themselves, as community leaders, and he called on members to commit themselves to a greater involvement in the Council's locality agenda.

Following his presentation of the report, members were given the opportunity to put questions to the Leader of the Council. Issues raised by members included:

- Swindon's lower core funding, compared with similar councils, and measures the Council can take to address this continuing funding imbalance
- the securing of a permanent location for the Town Centre Christmas market
  - the business framework to support such exhibition and the quality of such future provision
- the redevelopment of the Locarno/Old Corn Exchange Area
- the Regent Circus development and the future of the Technical College in Victoria Road
- the proposed improvement of gateways into Swindon and the opportunity for new signage to make reference to the town's friendship and co-operation agreement with Torun
- the outcome of the LGA submission to Central Government regarding the significant savings made by local authorities, in line with the government's austerity measures, and the Association's contention that other government departments have been put under considerably less pressure to reduce budgets
- the Council's enforcement of existing byelaws and the feasibility of such responsibility being devolved to the localities
- the reintroduction of the "highways budget" for allocation by each locality area
- car parking capacity in the town centre and the restrictive width of car parking bays in town centre car parks
- the annual maintenance cost of the new town centre car park
- the delivery of new neighbourhood community facilities
- the Council's role in "pump-priming" for economic regeneration and encouraging housing growth and the enhancement of social housing provision within the borough
- the new village store for Wichelstowe and the importance of consultation with Wroughton residents regarding retail provision at Wichelstowe
- the Council's management structure and corporate capacity and its effectiveness in support the Leader and the Executive in running of the Council
- the engagement of backbench members in the executive management of the Council
- the Leader's support of the Thamesdown Drive/Barnfield Relief Road

- the issue of Broadband coverage in the rural areas, particularly in areas identified for future employment use

The Chair thanked Councillor Renard for his informative presentation of his Annual report and for his full and open responses to members' questions.

## **6. Work Programme 2013/14**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services on the results of the 2013/14 Overview and Scrutiny work programme consultation exercise and inviting the Committee to agree a rolling work programme for the Scrutiny Committee for 2013/14, taking into account the issues raised in the Leader of the Council's presentation to this meeting and the results of the consultation exercise.

Resolved – (1) That, subject to the minor amendments to the programming of items referred to during the debate of this item, the draft work programme 2013/14, tabled at the meeting, be approved.

(2) That it be noted that the approved work programme is necessarily flexible in order to accommodate any issues arising, or changes in priorities, over the period of the year.

(3) That it be noted that a report on the continuation of the work of the Committee's Localities Scrutiny Sub-Committee in 2013/14, and the work of the Sub-Committee to date, was intended to be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.

(4) That Councillors Dickinson and Bennett be the Conservative appointed members on the Localities Sub-Committee. That the Scrutiny Officer be advised of the two Labour appointed representatives on the Sub-Committee as soon as possible.

(5) That, if available, the Council's new model arrangements for the Localities be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.