

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2013

(CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING ADJOURNED FROM 16TH SEPTEMBER 2013)

PRESENT:- Councillors Kevin Small (Chair), Andrew Bennett, John Ballman, Emma Faramarzi, Mary Friend, Cindy Matthews, Des Moffatt, John Haines and Steve Weisinger.

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, 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, Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, Richard Hurley, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Housing and Streetsmart (Delivery), Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways, Strategic Transport and Leisure and Toby Elliott were also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Dickinson (Vice-Chair), Brian Ford, Colin Lovell, Maureen Penny, Stan Pajak and Robert Wright

22. Declarations of Interest

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

23. Public Question Time

Kareen Boyd, a resident of Hesketh Crescent, Old Town, Swindon, put questions regarding the funding and management of the University Technical College Design and Build contract and the possibility that the Council might incur penalty charges as a result of the adjournment of the Scrutiny meeting from Monday 16th September until Friday 20th September. Ms Boyd also asked that the answers to her questions be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

The Chair thanked Ms Boyd for her questions. He responded to her questions regarding the adjournment of the meeting and the Council's practice regarding the recording of answers to public questions. With regard to the issues she had raised regarding the funding and management of the UTC contract, the Chair advised that these would be addressed later in the meeting, when the Committee reviewed the relevant Cabinet decision (Minute 25 refers).

Brian Cockbill, a resident of Stratton St. Margaret, put questions regarding

1. a local bus service
2. pedestrian rights of way on the highway, specifically in that area of Regent Circus where the light controlled pedestrian crossing facility had recently been removed
3. the Mechanics Institute

4. the status of responses to questions he had put to the Council meeting on 17 July 2013 regarding the Community Governance review
5. the Scrutiny Committee's Digital City Task Group review

Councillor Keith Williams, the Cabinet Member for Highways, Strategic Transport and Leisure, supported by Councillor Toby Elliott, responded to Mr Cockbill's question nos 1 and 2. The Chair indicated that he would discuss the matter of pedestrian crossing in Regent Circus with the Cabinet Member outside the meeting and advise Mr Cockbill of the outcome of that discussion. The Committee was advised that the Council's Director of Law and Democratic Services had provided Mr Cockbill with written response to his questions nos 3 and 4 in advance of this meeting. The Chair and Councillor Des Moffatt, the Chair of the Committee's Digital City Task Group, responded to Mr Cockbill's question no. 5.

24. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 29 July and 12 August 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

25. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 11 September 2013.

39. Implementation of the Local Bus Strategy

Resolved – That Minute 39 of the Cabinet be noted.

40. Children's Centres - re-provision of services

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, responded to questions put by members of the Scrutiny Committee regarding:

- maintaining provision for families and the closure of several centres currently providing children's services facilities and activities
- the consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed re-provision, the apparent reduction in the level of resources focussed on the most vulnerable people and the implications of proposals that several centres would, effectively, become pre-schools
- the future leasing and management arrangements in relation to the Croft and Eldene centres
- the provision of an outreach service in these areas
- the decision to maintain the "Ladybird" facility in Highworth rather than the "Saplings" facility in Stratton
- the distinction in the report between the two different definitions used to identify "vulnerability" and the implications of this variation for the allocation of resources
- the categorisation of children's services as preventative services and the methodology for determining the success of such preventative services
- the importance of, and the success of, the outreach service in the borough's rural areas

- the effectiveness of the consultation exercise undertaken in relation to the proposed re-provision of services, the validity of outcomes, and the percentage of respondents
- the feasibility of substantially increasing the consultation budget and the likelihood that such provision might detrimentally impact on available resources for services for vulnerable people
- the conclusion of existing contracts in March 2015 and the Council's intention to tender for services in Autumn 2014 (as stated in the report)
- the basis for the composition of the proposed "super cluster"
- the suggestion that resources available for provision in Pinehurst and Penhill would be reduced as a result of the proposals
- the record of the proposed split between vulnerable and non-vulnerable provision for the allocation of resources
- members' routes for redress under the proposed new provision arrangements
- the level of member consultation regarding the proposals
- the plans to consult parents regarding the proposals and for communicating with parents regarding outcomes
- the future of the Croft Children's Centre building for use by either Children & Families Services or early years' education and the timescale for making the determination regarding its future usage
- the implications of the proposals for individual centres and the families that use them
- the petition managed by the Swindon Advertiser regarding the proposed re-provision of services

Resolved – That Minute 40 of the Cabinet be noted.

41. Budget Management 2013/14

Resolved – That Minute 41 of the Cabinet be noted.

42. Capital Programme Monitoring First Quarter 2013/14

Resolved – That Minute 42 of the Cabinet be noted.

43. Debt Management

Resolved – That Minute 43 of the Cabinet be noted.

44. Draft Swindon Sports Strategy 2013-2017

Resolved – That Minute 44 of the Cabinet be noted.

45. Options Appraisal Leisure and Culture Commissioning - Theatre Provision

Councillor Garry Perkins, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture responded to members' questions on the following issues:

- the anticipated level of any future subsidy and the factors that will influence that level of subsidy

- the different offers of the Wyvern and the Arts Centre and how the Cabinet Member envisaged that the uniqueness of the Art centre offer would be maintained as part of any new contract arrangements
- the receptiveness of the Council to any proposals that might be put forward by the advocates of an Independent Arts centre
- the evidence to support the Cabinet's position that negotiating a contract extension with the existing supplier would deliver better value than undertaking a full procurement exercise
- the importance of ensuring the transparency of negotiations for any proposed extension of the theatre management contract
- the availability of comparative cost information in respect of both the procurement and contract negotiation options
- the recognition that there is very limited scope to attract bidders with a demonstrable and sustained record for quality theatre provision and that the current provider had significant experience and a proven track record of national theatre management

Resolved – That Minute 45 of the Cabinet be noted.

46. Swindon's Energy Future - Solar Barrier Along A419 - Motion at Council

Resolved – That Minute 46 of the Cabinet be noted.

47. Local Government Ombudsman Review 2013

Resolved – That Minute 47 of the Cabinet be noted.

48. Wichelstowe Development - Joint Venture Strategy

Resolved – That Minute 48 of the Cabinet be noted.

49. UTC Swindon (Design and Build Contract and Council Contribution to Set-up Funding)

At the request of the Chair, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to questions put during public question time, at the start of this meeting, regarding the UTC Design and Build contract.

Resolved – That Minute 49 of the Cabinet be noted.

It was agreed that information requested by individual members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to the Committee Clerk for distribution to Scrutiny Committee members.

26. Cabinet Member Question and Answer - Cabinet Member for Customer Support and Corporate Services

Councillor Claire Ellis, Cabinet Member for Customer Support and Corporate Services, was in attendance and presented a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within her portfolio of responsibility:

- Human Resources, Personnel & Trades Union Relations (including Staff Nursery)
- Member Development
- Customer Services, including the One Stop Shop
- Health and Safety
- Civic Campus
- Digital by Default
- IT Strategy and Core Processes, ICT delivery
- Programmes and IT Projects
- Community Buildings,
- Property portfolio
- Building & Engineering
- Building Services, cleaning, catering & security services
- Customer Experience
- Swindon Traded Services

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Ellis, in her presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements of her portfolio that she felt had been most successful, those where a different approach might have produced better results and the lessons that might have been learned as a consequence, and the challenges she expected to be faced by the Council relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond.

Following her presentation of the report, Councillor Ellis responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following issues:

- the members' hotline facility and member training in relation to the Council's organisational structure and service areas and responsibilities
- the council's "digital by default" on-line offering
- problems with the online bulletin service and the compatibility of the electronic diary with some devices
- the availability to members of locality-based contact information
- employees' terms and conditions of service and the implications of SCS services being taken back "in-house"
- organisational changes and pay scales
- the Council's response to the recent LGA regional pay consultation
- the suggestion that a number of Council employees were earning only slightly above minimum wage

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 Ellis be thanked for attending the meeting and for her full and open responses to members' questions and observations.