

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2013

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

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, 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), and Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, were also in attendance.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Michael Dickinson (Vice-Chair)

41. Declarations of Interest

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

42. Public Question Time

Hannah Parry, Director of Swindon Viewpoint, referred to the externalisation of the Create Studios service and sought the Committee's support for Swindon Viewpoint's position that One Swindon principles and the encouragement of Swindon's cultural offer would be best served through positive and co-operative working between the facilities.

The Chair and Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, with Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to Ms Parry's question (Minute 44 below also refers).

43. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

44. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

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

63. *Adult Community Learning - Outcome of Ofsted Inspection*

Resolved – That Minute 63 of the Cabinet be noted.

64. *Proposed Changes to the Waste Collection Service*

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Hurley, the Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Housing and Streetsmart (Delivery), and Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by members of the Committee regarding;

- suggested revisions to the scheme, put forward by members during the Cabinet's consideration of the proposals at its meeting on 11th December 2013;
- the cost of the current waste collection service and the level of anticipated savings accruing from the proposed changes to the service;
- the assessment of savings and whether this takes account of all implementation costs, including costs relating to revenue collection, current service decoupling, setting up the new service and other operational overheads;
- the level of financial information provided in the report needed to support the Cabinet decision and facilitate proper scrutiny of that decision;
- the estimated savings resulting from the proposed changes to the green waste service (£720k) based on an estimated initial take-up level of 20% in year one, and the minimum service take up necessary to secure the "break even" position
- the availability of the project business case for inspection by the Scrutiny Committee and the apparent failure of the Cabinet to give due consideration to the business case or the worst case scenario of a "non-profit" take up
- the proposed annual charge for the green waste collection service of £40 a year, compared to the original proposal of £70 in the first year, and the effect of this revised charge on anticipated savings
- the proposed charge for the green waste collection service and the expression of the charge as an equivalent increase in Council Tax
- the timeframe for members' consideration and evaluation of a finalised waste collection scheme
- the cost price of green waste bins and the one-off implementation costs to be recovered from the annual charges to service users
- the impact on cost savings of any increase in landfill charges resulting from the disposal of recyclable waste via the waste collection service
- the impact of the additional cost associated with the provision of additional recycling boxes to households
- the impact on the cost effectiveness of the RDF project of any increase in the percentage of recyclable and green waste disposed of via the household waste collection service and whether this has been factored into the overall costing of the proposed revisions to the waste collection service and associated savings
- the full year savings projections for 2014/15 and the explanation of the absence of any accrued savings in the current financial year, following implementation in February 2014, due to necessary vehicle fleet remodelling.

Resolved – (1) That the decision be referred back to Cabinet for consideration of the various financial issues raised during the course of the Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the matter.

(2) That special meetings of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee be convened on dates and at times to be agreed between the Chair and the Leader of the Council, in order to ensure that, if approved, the proposals can be implemented in time to achieve the projected savings.

65. Budget Management 2013/14 and Draft Budget 2014/15

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, and Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, responded to questions put by Councillors Stan Pajak, Bob Wright and Andrew Bennett regarding:

- the current level of the assumed funding gap and the potential benefit of a Council Tax increase of 1.9% in 2013/14
- the development of the outline business case for a solar sound barrier pilot scheme along the A419 trunk road and the viability of such scheme being implemented along the M4 corridor
- the Local Government funding system and the continuing under-funding of Swindon by Central Government
- the “passporting” of Council Tax Support Grant funding to Parish Councils in 2014/15 and beyond

Resolved – That Minute 65 of the Cabinet be noted.

66. Leisure and Culture Change Programme - Create Studios

Resolved – (1) That Minute 66 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That this Committee notes the comments made by Ms Hannah Parry (Director, Swindon Viewpoint), during public question time at the start of this meeting, regarding positive and co-operative working and welcomes the comments of Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, endorsing the Council’s support for joint working opportunities with, and between, public and private sector organisations for the development of Swindon’s cultural offer.

67. Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Relocations

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to a question put by Councillor Cindy Matthews regarding disabled access to the Wyvern Theatre and permanent disabled access to any proposed town centre site for Swindon’s art and museum collections and to the Town Centre “cultural offer” as a whole.

Resolved – That Minute 67 of the Cabinet be noted.

68. Capital Programme 2013/14 Second Quarter 2013/14

Resolved – That Minute 68 of the Cabinet be noted.

69. Swindon Borough Council Housing Allocations Policy

Councillor Richard Hurley, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Housing and Streetsmart (Delivery) and Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance,

with the Council's Head of Housing services, responded to questions and observations put by Councillors Cindy Matthews, Des Moffatt and Bob Wright on the following issues:

- the exclusion from eligibility for social housing of persons able to afford to purchase a property
- the definition of "homelessness" under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996
- the cost to the Council of reviewing fixed term tenancies
- the results of the consultation exercise undertaken in support of the proposed new Allocations Policy
- the allocations policy with regard to:
 - children of a former relationship
 - applicants with a housing related debt to the Council or a Housing Association or Private landlord
 - refusals
 - the arrangements for the letting of two bedroom bungalows, where one of the occupants has a caring role
- the implications of a constantly changing housing market on individuals' ability to purchase a home and the suggestion that for the housing allocations policy to be effective it needs to be closely allied with a social housing build programme
- the importance of ensuring that the housing allocations policy is responsive to those with the greatest housing need

Resolved – That Minute 69 of the Cabinet be noted.

70. *Draft Updated Library Strategy*

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, supported by the Council's Head of Leisure, Libraries & Culture – Delivery, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Andrew Bennett and John Ballman on the following issues:

- the scope and robustness of the continuing consultation with key organisations and groups on the library strategy generally and, in particular, the reshaping of the Mobile Library Service
- the effectiveness of the public consultation undertaken prior to the closure of the Gorse Hill Community library
- the application in the draft strategy of the successful "Even Swindon model for library service provision" (co-location within community buildings and shared staffing resources) and the future review of the operation of that library
- the feasibility and possible use of the Gorse Hill Community Centre for the provision of a community library service
- the extent and scale of the proposed public consultation in support of the strategy development

Resolved – That Minute 70 of the Cabinet be noted.

71. *Swindon Heritage Strategy (Minute for Confirmation)*

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to a question put by Councillor Bob Wright regarding the continuing support for existing conservation orders relating to the Railway Village.

Resolved – That Minute 71 of the Cabinet be noted.

72. *Skills and Employment Strategy*

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Culture, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Brian Ford and Bob Wright regarding:

- the involvement and contribution of local educational establishments in meeting the skills requirements of employers
- the definition of “apprenticeship”, as used in the strategy support documentation
- the inclusion in the qualification framework of the defined time period for the attainment of each apprenticeship

Resolved – That Minute 72 of the Cabinet be noted.

73. *Community Right to Challenge*

Resolved – That Minute 73 of the Cabinet be noted.

74. *Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors’ Allowances – Recommendations 2013/14*

Resolved – That Minute 74 of the Cabinet be noted.

75. *References from Other Council Bodies: Swindon Children's Trust Board / Equalities Advisory Forum / Health and Wellbeing Board*

Resolved – That Minute 75 of the Cabinet be noted.

45. Leader of the Council: Annual Report

Further to Minute 5, Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, submitted his half-yearly report on the Council’s performance in delivering its service priorities and targets for 2013/14 and beyond and also his level of success in delivering the specific leadership priorities he had identified in his report to the Scrutiny Committee in June 2013. Councillor Renard also included in his introduction of the report, an update of the position in relation to the support and number of short-term breaks for carers, through the Swindon Carers Support Programme, which information was not available at the time of agenda despatch.

The Leader’s report was accompanied by a short “Stronger Together” video presentation, reviewing of some of the Council’s achievements over the last year. The video had been prepared for the final all staff briefing sessions of 2013, the content coming from various sources including performance reports, business plan progress reports and, perhaps most importantly, from staff who were asked to highlight the work they were most proud about and share their stories. As well as reviewing achievements across a whole range of services, the presentation was also designed to show how all of that work contributes to each of the following 5 Council priorities:

- Together, find new ways to reduce vulnerability and improve health for all

- Work with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods
- Right skills, right jobs, in the right places
- Work with people and families to help them fulfil their potential
- Make best use of Swindon's resources inside and outside the Council

Following Councillor Renard's introduction of his report and the video presentation, members were given the opportunity to put questions to him on the subject matter of his report and the presentation. Issues raised by members included:

- the effectiveness of the community-led clean up events
- the Christmas Market in Canal walk and support for the market in future years
- the brief for the Locarno/Corn Exchange and the timeframe for the regeneration of this vital area of Old Town
- the reduced funding available for statutory authority enforcement action, particularly in relation to planning breaches, food safety contraventions, highways management and anti-social behaviour offences
- the impact of on-going budget reductions on local government innovation and, ultimately, on local democracy
- car parking issues and the pilot "community led parking notification" scheme in North Swindon
- the success of the Haydon Wick Walking Group
- joint working with local businesses to clean up litter and working with schools to educate pupils and promote a litter free environment
- the "Troubled families" project
- the significant role of the voluntary sector in supporting both the local community and the Council in achieving its objectives
- improvement of the appearance of gateways into Swindon and opportunities to enhance main routes not classified as gateway routes
- the impact of budget reductions on the Council's ability to properly respond to car parking enforcement issues
- the availability of evidence to support the various successes outlined in the presentation, particularly in relation to town centre regeneration and claims of job creation
- the recent street lighting failures in the town centre and the importance of ensuring such faults are rectified without any unnecessary delay.

The Chair concluded this item by thanking the Leader of the Council for his attendance and for his full and open answers to members' questions in relation to the issues and priorities identified in his presentation.

46. Chair's Announcements

The Chair advised the meeting of a training event for Scrutiny members. This was a two part event, facilitated by RADA, and would be convened on the evenings of Thursday 30th January and Thursday 13th February 2014.

The Chair also reminded members of the special meeting of the Committee that would convene on the evening of Wednesday 22nd January 2014 to receive the final report of the Scrutiny Committee Task Group established to review the final accounts of the Digital City (UK) Ltd wi-fi project.