

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 28 JULY 2014

PRESENT:- Councillor Robert Wright (Chair), Councillors John Ballman, Mark Dempsey, Toby Elliott, Colin Lovell, Mary Martin (Vice-Chair), Cindy Matthews, Maureen Penny, James Robbins, Vera Tomlinson, Steve Weisinger, Robert Wright (Chair), Ann Richards and Timothy Swinyard

Councillors David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council, Vice-Chair of Cabinet, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety, Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, and Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Leisure Services, were also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kevin Parry and Stan Pajak.

9. Declarations of Interest

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

Councillor Cindy Matthews made non-prejudicial declaration of interest in relation to the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 17 ("Children's Centres Consultation") in her capacity as chair of the Advisory Boards of Saltway, West Swindon, Eldene, Croft and Robert Le Kyng Children's Centres. Councillor Maureen Penny also made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of this same matter, in her capacity as chair of the Highworth Ladybird Centre.

10. Public Question Time

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, responded to questions put by Anne Snelgrove and Michelle Agostina on matters relating to the Council's proposed changes to the Children's Centres service.

11. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th June 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

12. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 23rd July 2014.

17. *Children's Centres Consultation*

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, supported by the Council's Head of Commissioning for Children and Adults, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Cindy Matthews, Mary Martin and James Robbins on the following matters:

- the Cabinet Member's and the current Administration's commitment to keeping remaining children's centres open
- maintaining the Supercluster as a provision and the aspiration of improving their service to reach 100% of vulnerable children and to support a reduction in demand for children's social care
- the consultation exercise and the feasibility of maintaining the current level of service provision
- the value of early years investment
- the rising pressure on social care and the likely impact of reduced children's centre provision as a result of the proposed budget savings
- support for vulnerable children provided by health visitors and voluntary services
- the availability of data relating to the "signalling and signposting" role of Children's Centres in making referrals to social care
- the likely impact of the proposed closures on the level of social care referrals
 - the additional cost of care as a result of any increase in the number of referrals and the Council's subsequent ability to realise the level of savings indicated in the report
- the 2010 National Evaluation of Sure Start and the demonstrable beneficial effect and positive outcomes of children's centres for children's health and for mothers and families
- the range of the consultation and the feasibility of extending the consultation beyond the scope of Children's Centres in order to better identify community priorities and possible alternative service reductions
- representations to the local Members of Parliament regarding the impact of budget cuts on Swindon residents
- the sharing of life birth data with Children's Centres and the role of Health Visitors as a conduit for the receipt of life birth information
- the recruitment and training of Health Visitors and the current number of Health Visitors in post.

Resolved - That Minute 17 of the Cabinet be noted.

18. *Budget Management 2014/15 (Minute 18(6) for confirmation)*

Councillors Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Leisure Services, Brian Mattock, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors James Robbins and John Ballman on the following matters:

- the timeframe for the preparation and consideration of the revised Library Strategy

- the current position regarding the cost of deprivation of liberty safeguards (DOLS)
- the recruitment of social workers and the increased reliance on social worker agency staff
 - the cost of social worker agency staff
 - remuneration levels for social workers and the Swindon offer
 - the likelihood that all social worker vacancies will be filled by permanent staff by 1st September 2014
- the loan facility requested by Swindon Commercial Services Ltd in support of its business case for investment in a can baler for the Recycling facility

Resolved - That Minute 18 of the Cabinet be noted.

19. *Capital Programme Monitoring and Treasury Management Performance 2013/14*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey, Toby Elliott and James Robbins on the following matters:

- the Council's net borrowing position and the level of interest payments on that borrowing
- the long term debt incurred as a result of the housing ballot
- the funding of additional School places in North Swindon
- the interest rates applicable to the Council's new long-term borrowing in 2013/14
 - the circumstances of the long-term loan from the London Borough of Newham
 - the Council's treasury management function in relation to achieving the best loan interest rates applicable to its long-term loan debt
 - the sustainability of the Council's long-term borrowing debt, given the potential increase detailed in the report
- the proposed revised budget for the expansion work at Even Swindon Primary School
- the response to the motion at Council on 3rd April 2014 regarding the S106 contributions towards Coate Water Country Park

Resolved - That Minute 19 of the Cabinet be noted.

(Councillor Robbins made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 19, in relation to his capacity as a governor of Even Swindon Primary School.)

20. *Swindon Local Transport Plan – Implementation Plan 2014/15*

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey and Mary Martin on the following matters:

- the current status of the Council's aspirations to the provision of a northern link road
- the sufficiency of finances available for rapid transit corridors and the likely timeframe for implementation

- proposals in this year's implementation plan to alleviate traffic congestion in North and West Swindon.

Resolved - That Minute 20 of the Cabinet be noted.

21. *Swindon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy*

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, and Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors James Robbins and Mary Martin on the following matters:

- consultation on the Flood Risk Management Strategy and the action open to residents in flood risk areas for their inclusion in future action plans
- the availability of DEFRA funding for homeowners and the process of applying for such funding
- the illegal fly-tipping of green waste into water courses
- the Council's Emergency Planning and continuity arrangements
- the Emergency Resilience Plan and Flood Action Groups
- the impact of flood resistance measures on other flood risk areas and the restrictions this might place on the implementation of such measures
- the limited use of sandbags to divert flood water and the effectiveness and availability of other water diversion measures
- working with the community to maintain water courses and associated safety issues
 - training and risk assessments.

Resolved - That Minute 21 of the Cabinet be noted.

22. *Swindon Emergency Assistance Fund*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, supported by the Council's Head of Revenues and Benefits, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Toby Elliott, Cindy Matthews on the following matters:

- the cost of administering the Emergency Assistance Fund and the process used for the distribution of food awards
- the automation of the awards process and the availability of suitable IT support
- the status of the proposed introduction of "Universal Credits"
- the Council's in-year collection rates for Council Tax.

Resolved - That Minute 22 of the Cabinet be noted.

23. *Council Tax Recovery and Debt Management*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, supported by the Council's Head of Revenues and Benefits, responded to questions put by Councillors Vera Tomlinson and Maureen Penny regarding:

- the pilot scheme to contact households in advance of the issue of summonses for non-payment of Council Tax
- assistance for households in producing payment plans for the repayment of Council Tax debts

- the interest charged on debts and additional charges that can be accrued as a result of non-payment of Council Tax
- the text messaging reminder initiative and the reasons for the increases in both the “before reminders and summonses” and “broken arrangements” messages.

Resolved - That Minute 21 of the Cabinet be noted.

13. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Corporate and Leisure Services

Councillor Keith Williams, the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Leisure Services, was in attendance and presented a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his 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 Design
- IT Strategy and Core Processes
- ICT delivery
- Programmes and IT Projects
- Building & Engineering
- Building Services, cleaning, catering & security services
- The Customer Experience
- Swindon Traded Services
- Recreation Services / Leisure and sports centres / Sports development
- Libraries

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Williams, in his presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within his portfolio which he 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 he expected to be faced by the Council relation to these service areas in the coming year and beyond, particularly in relation to on-going budgetary constraints.

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

- Implementation of the Council's ICT for the next five years and the appointment of a new Head of ICT
- the Council's due diligence in relation to the preferred bidder for its golf services and the assessed credit risk of the company
 - the preferred bidder's most recent financial accounts and details of their cash assets

- the Council's commercial arrangements in relation to its leisure facilities and the feasibility of addressing outstanding member and public concerns through contract arrangements
- the transfer of the council's leisure facilities and the protection of less-viable facilities in the longer term
 - the "keep open" clauses within the contract
 - the "keep open" periods and first call on the leisure assets in the event of the management company becoming bankrupt after these periods of time
- the timeframe for development of the Oasis site and issues relating to the management of the project
- the availability of the 2013 Financial accounts of the preferred bidder for the Council's golf services
- the availability of comparative performance data
- the future of the Highworth Rec (in the event it is not included in the leisure facilities transfer)
- the backlog maintenance position for leisure services
- the level of consultation on the draft library strategy
- the recruitment of volunteers to support staff within the library service

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Williams, and his support team of officers, be thanked for attending the meeting to present this performance report and for their full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to members via the Committee Clerk.