

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2014

PRESENT:- Councillors John Ballman, Mark Dempsey, Toby Elliott, Mary Martin (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Cindy Matthews, Kevin Parry, Maureen Penny, James Robbins, Vera Tomlinson, Steve Weisinger, Nick Martin and Ann Richards

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robert Wright (Chair)

18. 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 Nick Martin declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 5 – Consideration of Cabinet decisions as he was a member of the Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority.

19. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

20. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2014, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

21. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 10 September 2014.

27. Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority Consultation

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children Services and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey and Mary Martin on the following matters:

- the Councils support for option 3, detailed in the Consultation document considered by Cabinet, and the possibility that this might lead to the closure of stations and or a reduction in the number of fire fighters in Swindon.
- Rebranding of the fire fighters uniform and equipment

Resolved – That Minute 27 of the Cabinet be noted

28. Budget Management 2014/15

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded to a question put by Councillor James Robbins on the following matter:

- Distribution and selling on at the waste recycling facility

Resolved – That Minute 28 of the Cabinet be noted

29. Capital Programme Monitoring – First Quarter 2014/15

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport responded to a question put by Councillor Cindy Matthews on the following matter:

- Section 106 funded projects

Resolved – That Minute 29 of the Cabinet be noted

30. Education Provision 2014-2017

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children Services responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey, Cindy Matthews James Robbins and Mary Martin on the following matters:

- The establishment of free schools in Swindon and the potential success of the bids
- Update on free school meals
- The number of children accessing early education and the Council's target uptake of 40%
- Special Educational Needs and the number of specialist providers

Resolved – That Minute 30 of the Cabinet be noted

31. Housing Strategy 2015-2026

Councillor Emma Faramarzi, Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety and Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport responded to questions put by Councillors Mark Dempsey, James Robbins, Nick Martin and Toby Elliott on the following matters:

- the Housing Strategy 2015-2026 and its ability to meet the challenge and demand for affordable housing, especially first time buyers and families
- The number of Council housing sold to tenants under the Right To Buy scheme
- New housing schemes and the number of parking spaces per dwelling

Resolved – That Minute 31 of the Cabinet be noted

32. Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Governance

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded to questions put by Councillors Cindy Matthews and Mark Dempsey on the following matters:

- Governance arrangements appeared to be excessive
- The importance of having political involvement to achieve the best possible decisions for Swindon
- Disappointment that higher education was not being supported by the Local Enterprise Partnership

Resolved – That Minute 32 of the Cabinet be noted

33. Town Centre Car Parking Rationalisation

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport responded to a question put by Councillor Mark Dempsey on the following matter:

- The progress of car parking at Kimmerfields

Resolved – That Minute 33 of the Cabinet be noted

34. Motion at Council – Traffic on Cricklade Road, Swindon

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

- Disappointment about the lack of action taken in relation to traffic on Cricklade Road
- Flexibility of the 3 year programme of design and feasibility work for major transport schemes

Resolved – That Minute 34 of the Cabinet be noted

35. Invest and Save for a Low Carbon Swindon – Swindon's Energy Future – Motion to Council

Resolved – That Minute 35 of the Cabinet be noted

36. References from Other Council Bodies – Licensing Committee

Resolved – That Minute 36 of the Cabinet be noted

22. Cabinet Member Question and Answer - Cabinet Member for Communities and Volunteering

Councillor Richard Hurley, Cabinet Member for Communities and Volunteering, 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:

- Localities and Devolution
- Capacity Building – promoting and developing community-based alternatives to traditional public services
- Parish and Town Councils/Community Council Engagement Strategies
- Community Strategy
- Services to the Community and Voluntary Sector
- Swindon Community Compact
- Community Engagement Strategies
- Community Buildings

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Hurley, 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 Hurley responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following topics:

- The non-attendance of members of the localities team at a recent fun day and a potential missed opportunity to promote the work of the team
- Funding for the production of the Cities of Service – Swindon Circles brochure
- The role of the localities team in helping communities and the financial impact of their work in the light of reducing budgets
- The ability to quantify and measure the financial success of the localities team work undertaken in the community
- The ability to measure the non-financial impact of the localities team
- The process of devolving decision making on Streetsmart and examples of good practice from other authorities
- The need to look at how to encourage residents to attend locality meetings and the different ways of publicising meetings in communities

Resolved –

(1) That Councillor Hurley, 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.

23. Review of Complaints Process

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report of the Cabinet member for Corporate Services and Leisure and the Head of Business Services and Support, about the current complaints process for the public, whether it was effective for the public to raise concerns and for those concerns to be acted upon.

Members were informed that the Council had well established Customer Feedback processes in place which were underpinned by a general Corporate Customer Feedback Policy. This Policy was revised in 2013 with additional steps for Housing Services as well as specific policies and procedures for Children, Young People & Families and Adult Services.

Following her presentation of the report, Councillor Foley and her support team responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following topics:

- Improvements to the system of receiving and recording complaints and comments and a reduction in the number of complaints received were welcomed
- Differences between a comment and a complaint and how they were responded to
- Concern at the number of green and black bags of waste across Swindon and the need for these to be collected and disposed of.
- An explanation of the reasons for the increase in complaints for 2014/15
- The tracking of unjustified complaints
- The need to inform members of the outcome of complaints and how they have been resolved
- Monitoring of monthly complaint reports and a request for the monitoring reports to be circulated to all members on a quarterly basis
- The need to monitor trends in new planning policy and the effect on the Grounds Maintenance budget, for example should the Council consider suggesting to developers that they lay grass instead of planting hedges therefore the knock on effect being that the Council avoids the need to spend time and money on trimming the hedges
- All complaints were recorded on LAGAN
- The success of the members hotline

Resolved:

1. That the level of complaints received in comparison to the overall level of activity the Council performs be noted
2. That the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart be asked to consider a one-off collection of green and black waste bags across Swindon
3. That the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Leisure Services be asked to consider circulating complaint monitoring reports to either Overview and Scrutiny Committee's or all members of the Council on a quarterly basis
4. That officers be asked to continue to inform members of the outcomes of investigations into complaints they or residents may have raised
5. That officers be asked to consider monitor trends in new planning policy and the effect on the Grounds Maintenance budget as detailed above