

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2014

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), Mark Dempsey, Toby Elliott, Colin Lovell, Mary Martin (Vice-Chair), Kevin Parry, Maureen Penny, Stan Pajak, James Robbins, Timothy Swinyard and Vera Tomlinson

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, 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 John Ballman, Cindy Matthews and Steve Weisinger and Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

30. Declarations of Interest

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

Councillors Maureen Penny and Mark Dempsey made non-prejudicial declarations of interest in relation to the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute 40 ("Children's Centres Consultation") in their capacity as chair of the Highworth Ladybird Centre and Governor of Abbey Meads Primary School, respectively. Councillor James Robbins made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in relation to the Committee's consideration of Cabinet Minute Cabinet Minute 43 ("Additional Primary School Places in Swindon Town Centre") in his capacity as a Governor of Even Swindon School.

31. Public Question Time

Mr Richard Symonds, a local resident, asked a question regarding the number of prosecutions pursued by the Council over the last 12 months in relation to the offence of failing to remove dog excrement. Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, responded to Mr Symonds question. The Chair asked that a written answer be provided to Mr Symonds.

Mr Roy Wallman asked for details of the "start up costs" for the Council's Green waste collection service. Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart, responded to Mr Wallman's question, providing him with a copy of information sheet produced in support of his Question and Answer Session (Minute 33 refers).

32. Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Director of Law and Democratic Services submitted a report introducing decisions arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 22 October 2014.

40. *Result of the Consultation for Children's Centres*

Councillor David Renard, the Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, supported by the Council's Board Director Commissioning and Head of Commissioning - Children and Adults, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Mark Dempsey, Jim Robbins, Stan Pajak, Toby Elliott, and Vera Tomlinson on the following matters:

- The results of the consultation exercise and changes made to the proposals as a direct consequence of the consultation responses.
- The criteria in place to determine the success, or otherwise, of the proposed changes in service provision.
- The degree to which financial resource pressure had necessitated this proposed change in service provision.
- The level of recorded opposition to the proposals and whether the consultation might be perceived, in some areas, as having been ineffectual.
- Cabinet's consideration of options alternative to the proposed de-commissioning of children's centres.
- Lessons learned from the way in which this consultation exercise was conducted and improvements that might be made for future consultations of this nature.
- Issues relating to the on-going national problem of the recruitment of social workers and health visitors.
- The co-ordination of preventative services and measures to maintain and enhance the Council's contact with hard to reach vulnerable families and children.
- The definition of "vulnerability" and the possible implications of the decision to prioritise family support outreach work to families living in areas with high numbers of vulnerable children.
- The "pupil premium" and the role of the Virtual Headteacher in relation to looked-after children.
- Capacity in the remaining Children's Centres to provide places for all identified vulnerable children and, specifically, the availability of places for families currently using those centres proposed for closure.
- The annual expenditure on children being taken into care and the number of vulnerable children taken into care annually.

Resolved – (1) That Minute 40 of the Cabinet be noted.

(2) That this Committee's recognition of the significant involvement and contribution of all the participants in the consultation exercise and the high standard of service provided through the Children's Centre service, be recorded.

41. *Budget Management 2014/15 and Draft Budget 2015/16 (Minute for Confirmation (Minute 41(2)))*

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Jim Robbins and Mark Dempsey regarding matters relating to the management of the Housing Revenue Account, the Council's engagement on the effects of devolution settlements on local government funding and the Council's long term debt position.

Resolved – That Minute 41 be noted.

42. *References from Other Council Bodies: Town Twinning Network*

Resolved – That Minute 42 of the Cabinet be noted.

In accordance with the National Code of Local Government Conduct, Councillor Martin made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of the Committee's consideration of this matter, in her capacity as a member of the Town Twinning Network.

43. *Additional Primary School Places in Swindon Town Centre*

Resolved – That Minute 43 of the Cabinet be noted

44. *Progressing the Economic Strategy - Developing Skills and Employment Opportunities through the Construction Industry*

Councillors Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills and Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport, responded to questions put by the Chair and Councillors Jim Robbins and Mark Dempsey on the issues of employment and training opportunities for looked after children, skills shortages in the job market and apprenticeship and job opportunities for young people in Swindon.

Resolved – That Minute 44 of the Cabinet be noted.

45. *Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review of Swindon*

Resolved – That Minute 45 of the Cabinet be noted.

46. *Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances - Recommendations 2015/16 (Minute for Confirmation)*

Resolved – That Minute 46 of the Cabinet be noted.

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

33. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Streetsmart

Councillor Brian Ford, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills, was in attendance and presented a detailed report summarising progress and performance in respect of each of the following service areas within his diverse portfolio of responsibility:

- Waterside Depot Management.
- SCS Trading.
- Streetsmart.
- Public Toilets.
- Waste Disposal / Waste Minimisation.

- Street Cleaning.
- Recycling.
- Refuse Collection – Domestic & Trade.
- Cemeteries & Crematoria.
- Ground & Tree Maintenance and open spaces.
- Removal of graffiti and abandoned vehicles.
- Parks.
- Playgrounds, including those that are not presently utilised.
- Maintenance of Roundabouts and non-HRA verges.
- Operational issues managing the Council's property portfolio (excluding council offices).

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Ford, in his presentation of the report, commented specifically on those elements within his portfolio that 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 Ford responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following issues raised in the presentation and also in the accompanying report:

- The effectiveness of the members' hotline arrangements.
- The reintegration of SCS, the management of outstanding and disputed invoices and IT investment to improve SCS's invoicing systems.
- The details of charges made for the Council's Green Waste Collection service and the Cabinet Member's evaluation, in the report, of the savings attributed to the service change.
- Issues relating to isolated incidents of green waste being left in the streets by unsubscribed households and the on-going audit to ascertain the location and volume of such green waste deposits.
- The award of the contract for the development of a skate park in West Swindon.
- The arrangements and timeframe for the replacement of damaged or misappropriated black wheelie bins.
- The availability of comparative data for green waste tonnage before and after the introduction of the green waste subscription service.
- The availability of comparative data for recycling rates.
- The identification of the sources of green waste left in streets by unsubscribed households.
- The annual net cost to the Council of the green waste subscription service.
- The timeframe for making waste collection and grass cutting schedules available on the website for public inspection.
- The Council's plans for a second household waste and recycling centre.
- The number of deposited green waste bags identified by the recent audit.
- The recognition of possible "hidden" costs incurred by the Council as a result of the introduction of the green waste subscription service and the impact of these on the level of savings attributed to the scheme.

- The percentage of the borough's household waste disposed of via the SRF Plant and the percentage going to landfill sites.
- The overall capacity and current level of usage of the SRF Plant.
- The profitability of the SRF Plant and the impact on profitability of green waste disposal through the household waste collection service.
- Savings made through the reduction in the number of vehicles used for the fortnightly kerbside recycling service.
- The problem of street cleaning in the town centre, due to the nature of the surfacing, and the cost of street cleaning in the town centre.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Ford, 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.