

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

Author:	Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to question the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport on his portfolio responsibilities and performance.
- 1.2 A key purpose of the Scrutiny function is to hold Cabinet to account and ensure that Council and partner's priorities and performance are being delivered.
- 1.3 Members of the Committee are reminded that all Members of the Cabinet are required to come before the Scrutiny Committee to take part in a Question and Answer session that will focus on the full remit of their portfolio. Scrutiny Committee is therefore encouraged to focus Question and Answer sessions with Cabinet Members on specific topics and/or services in order to avoid duplication.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport, to put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member, and to decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport is Councillor Dale Heenan. The Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position are as follows:
 - 3.1.1 Sustainability;
 - 3.1.2 Strategic Transport Network;
 - 3.1.3 Public Transport (including Concessionary Fares, Specialist Transport, Council Transport and Fleet Management);
 - 3.1.4 Traffic and Transport Forward Planning (including Local Transport Plan and Implementation of Local Transport Plan);
 - 3.1.5 Strategic Highways & Maintenance Works;
 - 3.1.6 Strategic Flood and Water Management.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Steve Jones, (01793) 463602 sjones@swindon.gov.uk or Stuart Figini (01793) 463612 sfigini@swindon.gov.uk

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

- 3.2 Up to May 2015, the portfolio also included Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Framework Planning and Libraries. This report also includes a brief narrative on significant achievements in planning between my last Scrutiny Q and A in December 2014 and the amendment to the portfolio in May. (Councillor Toby Elliot holds portfolio responsibility from May 2015).

What have you done well?

Plans and Strategies - Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy

- 3.3 The Local Plan is the Council's most important place shaping document. It plans for Swindon's growth in jobs, houses, leisure and retail whilst protecting the best of our natural and historic environment. It also ensures that we have an appropriate level of infrastructure to support this development, including new and improved roads and cycleways, sustainable drainage and low carbon energy. I am delighted to say that the Local Plan was adopted unanimously by Council in March 2015, having been being found sound by an independent inspector last year.
- 3.4 The Local Plan is critical to ensure that the policies exist to support the decisions to fulfil our aspirations. All planning decisions made must take the Local Plan into account, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. We require an up to date Local Plan to ensure that we are protected from inappropriate development, and to enable the Council to secure developer contributions, and bid for external funding. The adoption of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Swindon is critical to support the infrastructure requirements of the Local Plan. Following a positive Inspector's Report, we were able to adopt our CIL commensurately with the Local Plan, again with cross party support.
- 3.5 Our new Local Plan now runs to 2026. Whilst this may seem a distant horizon, large-scale development takes a long time to come to fruition and pressure remains to support economic growth and prosperity in the future.

Sustainability projects

- 3.6 The Government is keen to promote solar energy as an alternative to the use of fossil fuels, and this is supported through national planning policy. In October 2013, Cabinet endorsed the report dealing with Swindon's energy future, which includes an aspiration for Swindon to produce sufficient low carbon energy to power all the Borough's residential properties (Cabinet Minute 56, 2013/14 refers). A key element in achieving this aspiration is for the Council to play an active role in bringing forward solar development on its own sites and encouraging solar installations on suitable sites elsewhere in the Borough.

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

- 3.7 The Council's efforts have seen over 147MW of renewable energy being granted planning permission, and there is a predicted income of £650,000 from April 2016 through increased business rates.
- 3.8 Safe and Warm, a Swindon Borough Council-led initiative, narrowly missed getting the top spot in the Community Footprint Awards, which give recognition to projects across England that have success in tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions. Since it began in 2009, Safe and Warm has helped or advised more than 15,000 households across the Borough. It has installed over 1,800 home insulation measures, and identified nearly £2million in unclaimed benefits, to help people keep warm at home for less.
- 3.9 Swindon's first Collective Energy Switching was launched in April 2013 as another practical measure to help residents manage their energy bills. Despite taking place at a time of very competitive energy offers, a total of 784 people signed up to the pilot scheme, with many benefitting from offers of between £30 and £80 reduction on their annual energy bill.
- 3.10 Whilst the opportunities for income and community benefit from energy projects are becoming clearer, the level of expertise and resource to secure these opportunities will demand greater joint working between departments and with external partners. This is particularly important with the Council's Sustainability expertise recently moving to SCS Ltd (now PPS Ltd).

Strategic Flood Risk Projects

- 3.11 Work is nearing completion on the final phase of the Cheney Manor Flood Mitigation scheme. The £3.4m project, largely funded through Government funding as a result of a successful bid by the Highways and Transport Team, will significantly reduce flood risk to circa 150 commercial and residential properties in the area.
- 3.12 The Wanborough Flood Mitigation Scheme is due to start on site in the coming months following the successful lobbying of the Environmental Agency to release grant funding a year earlier than planned. The £360k project will reduce significant flood risk to 53 properties.

Highways and Transport

- 3.13 The amount and scale of infrastructure work set to take place in coming years will result in significant levels of temporary roadworks and disruption across the network. The Street Works team received 27,629 notices from utility operators and contractors between July 2014 and June 2015. While the team works hard to publicise these works and makes every effort to minimise disruption there remains concern from the travelling public and from business about the impact of these works. A new Strategic Programme Board comprising senior officers and

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

myself will meet as required to plan and review the impacts of roadworks across the Borough.

- 3.14 Work on the Bruce Street Bridges and Newcombe Drive Highway Improvement Scheme is approaching the latter phases of the project with works in the Great Western Way carriageway due to be substantially complete by the end of the year.
- 3.15 A map showing the main roadworks affecting traffic in Swindon is available on the Swindon Borough Council Website and further information about each of the schemes can be obtained by clicking on the relevant icon.
- 3.16 The service continues to be challenged by maintaining service delivery in light of increasing workload. Officer case loads are now running at high levels. This is exacerbated because it is becoming difficult to recruit experienced technical staff in the face of a national upturn in infrastructure investment. Locally there is a significantly larger capital programme of schemes than for many years and it will be a challenge to resource the programme to ensure delivery of schemes within the desired timescale. A range of options around staff recruitment and retention are being investigated to address this concern.
- 3.17 Recent harsh winters and wet summers have taken their toll on Swindon's roads and nationally and the expectation is that road condition will continue to deteriorate as the gap between steady state funding requirements and actual budgets grows. Graphs showing the condition indicators of the various categories of highway are included in Appendix 1.
- 3.18 The commercial bus operators face significant cost and revenue challenges to maintain their current network without significant levels of subsidy. The Council's Bus Strategy seeks to promote the highest level of commercial operation to avoid further pressure to provide subsidised services. This will remain a challenge until passenger ridership picks up again following the recession and regeneration and growth (particularly in the Swindon town centre) boosts passenger numbers. The Council is currently working on implementing additional bus services through Bus Service Operators Grant funding to help improve the network further. As part of this programme additional ways of publicising bus service information and priorities will be explored.
- 3.19 In future we will face the needs from further development such as the Eastern Villages the ways in which passengers are transported will be explored. At present, the form of travel by using the diesel engine powered bus remains the best way of moving large numbers of people along the road. But it may now be time to explore alternative means of travel such as the introduction of driverless transport technologies, and using more environmentally friendly forms of energy.

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

- 3.20 A system of bus lane enforcement cameras was commissioned in August 2014. The on-street equipment is supported by a substantial 'back office' processing system to deal with offences that are detected. A report on the impact of the system will be submitted to Cabinet within the next 6 months.
- 3.21 The professional services contract with CH2MHill is used to provide significant additional technical resources across the service area. The current contract extension ended earlier this summer and at the time of drafting this report terms are being agreed for a further extension of up to twelve months. I remain keen to see capability enhanced within the Highways and Transport department so that professional services are only used where expertise is required, rather than to assist in capacity or functions like design services.
- 3.22 Decisions on the allocation of maintenance funding from April 2015 were included in the Swindon Local Transport Plan Implementation Plan 2015/16 report approved by Cabinet in June (Cabinet Minute 11, 2015/16 refers). A copy of the work plan appendix attached to that report is included in Appendix 2, together with a summary of the major maintenance prioritisation process. The work plan now comprises a three-year rolling programme to give both residents of Swindon and Members an indication of when major maintenance may happen in any given street if not planned for the immediate programme.
- 3.23 In December 2014, the Secretary of State for Transport announced a change in the way grant funding for highway maintenance is allocated to local authorities, effectively top-slicing the total grant to create the Challenge Fund and the Incentive Fund.
- 3.24 Under the Challenge Fund, local authorities were invited to submit bids for major maintenance schemes that could not be reasonably funded from the core grant allocation because of their size, Department for Transport (DfT) categorised these schemes as small schemes between £5m and £20m, and large schemes in excess of £20m. Local authorities were set the challenging deadline of 9 February 2015 to submit proposals to be delivered in the first funding tranche covering the 3 year period 2015/18. Swindon's LED street lighting conversion bid, "A brighter future for Swindon" ultimately proved to be unsuccessful, a copy of the DfT feedback letter is attached as Appendix 3. As part of the bidding exercise DfT received 147 bids requesting £1.4b funding against a funding budget of £275m. I am pleased to be working with the Highways and Streetsmart Committee who have agreed to investigate this topic further, and provide recommendations by the end of the year about how Swindon might progress.
- 3.25 Details of the Incentive Fund were released in June 2015. Allocations from this fund from 2016/17 onwards will be based on a questionnaire that covers the areas of asset management, resilience, customer, benchmarking and efficiency,

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

and operational delivery. The resulting score will place the authority in one of three bands, which will determine the percentage of fund to be awarded. The percentage award will operate on a sliding scale over a 6-year period rewarding high performing councils with extra funding. At the time of drafting this report, the full implications of the self- assessment questionnaire were still being considered and will subject to a further report by officers. One of the mandatory questions to achieve a band 2 score is to evidence that the asset management policy and strategy has been signed off by the Council's Executive body. It is my intention to take a report to Cabinet on this topic in October. An early draft of the high level policy and strategy document is attached in Appendix 4.

- 3.26 Following the introduction of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Council became the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) responsible for flood risk in Swindon and published its Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and year one Action Plan in July 2014. At the time of drafting this report, the Action Plan is under review with aim of publishing an updated Action Plan later in the summer. The role of LLFA's has recently been extended to become a statutory consultee on planning applications for major development in relation to surface water drainage and a post has been created in the Asset Management Team to accommodate this role.
- 3.27 The topic of the future Thamesdown Drive extension road is a project I am keen to see resolved. A Cabinet Member Advisory Group on the Thamesdown Link has been established to develop and review an Outline Strategic Business Case for a Thamesdown to Barnfield Relief Road. The first meeting took place in March 2015 and there have been three subsequent meetings. This cross party group includes local community representatives and is working collaboratively to take forward this project to business case submission through the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Enterprise Partnership, and this is anticipated to occur within the next three months. Work continues behind the scenes on preparations for major transport projects funded through the Local Growth Fund. These schemes relate to improvements at M4 junctions 15 and 16, and roads to serve the New Eastern Villages along with developing quality bus corridors to major development areas.
- 3.28 Each Locality has been allocated £25,000 of highways capital funding in 2015/16 to allow for local priority schemes to be taken forward that address locally expressed community concerns over minor highways issues. In order to improve deliverability a dedicated project management resource within Highways and Transport has been allocated to this programme.

What would you do differently?

- 3.29 Sustainable energy is key to our future. My portfolio includes sustainability, and highways. I am passionate about finding and implementing innovative solutions to problems, and the increased contribution that renewable energy can make is

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

an area that I would have liked to have progressed to a greater degree. Although we have identified potential solutions, their evaluation and progression has been a slow process. However, I am confident that we are in a position where we can realise the benefits of renewables from underused land. Work is moving apace on solar solutions, with land identified for potential solar energy installations and planning guidance now nearing completion that would enable many solar projects to be brought forward outside of the planning process, which will speed up their delivery.

- 3.30 In Highways, we need to review our approach to the co-ordination of Streetworks with a view to reducing the impact of congestion arising from the cumulative amount of works happening on our highway network. I am pleased that the Highways committee accepted my request for a cross party working group to consider this with me.

What are the Challenges facing your portfolio

- 3.31 We need consider how to continue supporting public transport against a background of reducing funding. 95% of the bus network is already commercial, and we will have to decide how best we can support the bus network to develop and grow as a long-term solution for a sustainable bus network. There are already instances where a commercial service cannot be operated, and where no viable alternative is possible.
- 3.32 There is an increasing demand in education transport provision for a growing population and we need to be able to find effective new initiatives to keep demand costs at bay and financially stable.
- 3.33 We continue to make progress on projects to enable the early and smooth delivery of sustainable energy installations where they have no significant environmental costs.
- 3.34 In this municipal year the Planning Committee will consider Local Development Orders (LDO's) that will free certain renewable energy projects from unnecessary planning red tape. If these LDO's are put in place, we would be in a strong position to deliver on our aspirations, with small-scale non-domestic heat pumps and district heating installations, hydrogen and electric car fuelling installations and pre-identified sites for solar farms no longer requiring formal planning consent. The LDOs were subsequently adopted in June 2015.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Committee can choose not to operate a Cabinet Portfolio Question and Answer session system.

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications arising as a result of this report. Any expenditure arising as a result of an item on the Committee's work programme will be met by the Overview and Scrutiny Support budget, subject to the approval of the Committee.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act requires every local authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other direct implications arising as a result of this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) is required at this stage. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Highway Condition Indicators
- 8.2 Appendix 2 –Local Transport Plan Implementation Plan and major maintenance

Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Transport Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2015

- 8.3 Appendix 3 - Challenge Fund feedback letter
- 8.4 Appendix 4 - Draft Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy