

Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning Q&A

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 14th September 2015

Author:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning
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 Communities and Strategic Planning 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 Note the report by the Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning,
- 2.2 Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning, and
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Leader of the Council has assigned the following responsibilities to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Strategic Planning, Councillor Toby Elliott.
 - 3.1.1 Strategic Spatial Planning and Development Framework Planning
 - 3.1.2 The New Eastern Villages
 - 3.1.3 Neighbourhood Planning
 - 3.1.4 Local Land Charges (incl. Building Control)
 - 3.1.5 Localities and Community Development

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- 3.1.6 Capacity Building [Promoting and developing community-based alternatives to traditional public services.]
- 3.1.7 Parish and Town Councils / Community Council Engagement Strategies
- 3.1.8 Community Strategy
- 3.1.9 Community Engagement Strategies
- 3.1.10 Sports Participation
- 3.2 Councillor Elliott has held responsibility for this portfolio only since May 2015, taking the Strategic Planning element formally held by Councillor Heenan. An update of planning achievements up to May 2015 was included in Councillor Heenan's Scrutiny 'Q and A' report of 10th August.

What have you done well?

Strategic Spatial Planning - Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy

- 3.3 As detailed by Councillor Heenan in his Question and Answer Report to Scrutiny 10th August 2015, 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.
- 3.4 We have recently adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which has replaced S106 Developer Contributions on most developments, excepting strategic sites such as the Eastern Villages that require significant infrastructure in their own right. We must review our CIL level to ensure we both encourage development and have sufficient funds to pay-to-pay for vital infrastructure.
- 3.5 Our new Local Plan runs to 2026. Whilst this may seem a distant horizon, large-scale development takes a long time to come to fruition and the Council remains committed to supporting economic growth and prosperity in the future. The Local Plan Inspector, through his modifications to the Local Plan, recommended the Council undertake an early review of the Plan to extend its horizon beyond 2026 and thereby make adequate provision for future housing and employment land requirements.
- 3.6 To begin the work of an early review of our Local Plan to ensure that it stays up to date and relevant, we have commissioned a Strategic Housing market Assessment (SHMA) with Wiltshire to assess housing need, type, size and tenure in the Swindon area, and are undertaking a review of our Strategic

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Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) to identify smaller scale housing opportunities in the Borough. Linked to this is an employment land review, which will assess the likely employment requirement in the Borough in the next Plan period, the suitability of our existing employment stock and the moving forward. These pieces of work should be completed by the middle of 2016 with full engagement of ward members.

- 3.7 Beneath the Local Plan, there are currently seven Neighbourhood Plans underway in the Borough all lead by Parish Councils. Good progress has been made and the Wroughton and South Marston Village Neighbourhood Plans are now at an advanced stage. The requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment to meet EU regulations is a particularly challenge for the Neighbourhood Plans to meet, but officers are assisting where possible to help the Parishes with this task.

Development Framework Planning

- 3.8 Throughout the summer, the Council has been working closely with Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL) to help drive forward the regeneration of Central Swindon. The next stage in the implementation of the Town Centre Masterplan is underway, with the appointment of Allies and Morrison and Metropolitan Workshop to identify routes to market to deliver regeneration schemes.
- 3.9 The Planning Team has also been working with FSL to create a comprehensive brownfield land register for the Borough. The proactive management of brownfield sites will help us unlock the obstacles to their development. Over time, this will reduce Swindon's reliance on greenfield sites and will help foster urban renewal.
- 3.10 Design is vital to building strong, effective communities and we have begun consultation on our draft Design Guide.

Building Control and Land Charges

- 3.11 Building Control has had a successful summer. Market Share has been maintained at 45%. In July 2015, the Service was part of the project team for 3 winning schemes at the prestigious LABC South West awards. The winning projects comprised:
- Best High Volume Housing – Thomas Homes, Churchward
 - Best Educational Building – University Technical College (UTC), Railway Village, Swindon
 - Best Commercial Building – The Great Western Designer Outlet Village

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Capacity Building, Community Action and Volunteering

- 3.12 On 18th March 2015, Cabinet approved a report that set out a more focused and targeted approach to the Council's work on Capacity Building, Community Action, and Volunteering. The action plan for 2015/16 focuses the Locality Teams' work into three areas of Targeted Programmes, Volunteering, and Devolved Decision Making. The following paragraphs highlight progress in those areas:

Targeted Programmes

Community Navigators

- 3.13 Delivered on behalf of Swindon CCG and Adult Social Care, this Transformation Award funded-programme formally launched in June 2015 following recruitment of 13 fte Community Navigators linked to all 26 GP practices in the Borough. Navigators provide direct support aimed at helping people self-manage their long-term health conditions. Working on a one to one basis, Navigators work with clients to access community resources and make significant lifestyle changes, which will better enable them to live a healthier and more independent life. In the 3 months the programme has been running, the team have received 175 referrals from GPs, and the first evaluation of the impact of this work will take place in the autumn.

Swindon Circles of Support

- 3.14 In addition, drawing on Transformation Award funding, this volunteer programme to reduce isolation and loneliness in targeted groups of older people has continued to grow in 2015. The programme has moved beyond its initial commissioned cohort and is now targeted at people aged 65+ based in social housing and their carers. Over 100 volunteers have signed up, matched to 70 older people, connecting them to community activities and support.
- 3.15 On the basis of this work, Swindon has been invited to help develop a "blueprint" for impact volunteering to support older people for US Cities of Service members.

Community Health and Wellbeing

- 3.16 We are continuing to develop and integrate a variety of health improvement, physical activity and positive lifestyle projects into a cohesive Community Health and Wellbeing Programme, further integrating the work of Health Ambassadors, Learning Ambassadors, Sports Participation and Health Improvement to encompass health checks and smoking cessation later this year.
- 3.17 We are currently working with the Sports Forum, Sport England and Wiltshire and Swindon Sport to develop new models for growing the "sport economy" in Swindon. The aim is to secure a sustainable future for the community sport

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sector in Swindon, reflecting the funding pressures that have reduced the Council's historic direct provision in this area

Town Centre

- 3.18 The last year saw the opening of the multi-agency hub for Town Centre operations at the Plus One building. This is joint accommodation for Town Centre based service and Police that enables work to be better co-ordinated, and aligned to community action.

Community Assets

- 3.19 All community centres in the Borough bar two are run by community organisations. For the two remaining centres (Pinetrees and Broadgreen), we are developing those as centres of community action in their local areas. The Localities restructure has enabled dedicated community facilitators to be deployed to those centres to generate usage and develop the range of activities at those centres to ensure these contribute to Council priorities. We are developing more effective local booking arrangements and are investing operating models that enable those centres to access grant funding not accessible to local authorities. Those proposals will come forward later in the year.

Volunteering

- 3.20 The changes to Localities priorities approved by Cabinet in March initiated a greater focus on volunteering. Our work on developing volunteering takes place on three levels:
- 3.20.1 Firstly, ensuring consistency of practice in the management and development of the 200+ community volunteers managed by directly the Localities team in the delivery of its programmes. Some these volunteers work with vulnerable people or are involved in community-led clean-ups and litter picks, and we work hard to ensure safe working practices for clients and volunteers
- 3.20.2 Secondly, promoting and supporting good practice in service volunteering across the Council. The Council has some high quality volunteer management practice, and Localities team will ensure that is shared across the organisation in order to improve overall standards of volunteer management across the organisation. Through our membership of the Cities of Service programme, we are investigating web-based routes for publicising, attracting and co-ordinating Council volunteering opportunities
- 3.20.3 Thirdly, we are working with full range of partners to develop the broader culture of service and volunteering across the Borough. Our current

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targeted volunteer programmes support the demand the agenda for health and social care through working with very defined cohorts. We do not yet have a mass participation programme that befits the emerging Vision for Swindon or that enables large numbers of people to demonstrate pride of place and contribute to their local area and to their Borough. Through the Council's membership of Involve Swindon, we are developing a proposal for a joint Employer Supported Volunteering Programme aims to tackle social isolation and loneliness. This will be through increasing employee volunteering support to existing projects across the voluntary and community sectors. In addition, we are looking to increase social connection using the "clean and green" agenda as a means of mobilising joint community and business volunteering to look after local neighbourhoods and public spaces.

Local Delivery

- 3.21 The Cabinet Report in March also approved changes to the way in which devolved decision-making and locally-based delivery are supported which have been implemented as part of the restructuring set out in that report.
- 3.22 Since April 2015, a pilot scheme has been in place with 4 parish councils to provide services that traditionally have been provided by the Borough Council. This process supports the principles both of the Council's Stronger Together Strategy and the Government's Localism Act 2011.

What would you do differently?

- 3.23 Being new to the portfolio, there is little that I have had the opportunity to reflect on in terms of doing things differently. There are, however, significant challenges facing the portfolio.

What are the Challenges facing your portfolio

- 3.24 The review of the Local Plan in a timely manner, working jointly with Wiltshire Council and the LEP.
- 3.25 The need to ensure effective delivery of development at the **New Eastern Villages (NEV)**, in particular the timely and efficient provision of excellent infrastructure to maximise benefits for all stakeholders.
- 3.26 Maintaining Development Management performance with a restricted resource and an increase in strategically important planning applications.
- 3.27 The need support the Parishes in the production of their Neighbourhood Plans.

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- 3.28 Ensuring resilience in the Land Charges Team, with both domestic and large commercial searches continuing to increase.
- 3.29 From a community action perspective, the key challenge is to increase the scale and impact of community action. Our experience is that Swindonians have resources, skills and a willingness to contribute, and the Council's ability to draw on that resource through the current workplan is made possible by grant funding from external sources, which is a finite pot that requires constant renewal. This is a challenge for long-term demand management work and the risk is that community projects cease before their benefits are realised.

4. Alternative Options

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

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 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.

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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 None.